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Gender and Genre in Welsh Arthurian Literature

Krista R. L. Kapphahn

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for the degree of PhD

Prifysgol Aberystwyth, Adran y Gymraeg
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Summary:

This project is a study of gender and genre in medieval Welsh Arthurian texts, focusing on variations between the so-called 'heroic' and 'courtly' genres, both of which underwent considerable adaptation within a Welsh milieu. It establishes models for the examination of gender in medieval Welsh texts: the competing masculine ideologies of heroism and chivalry, the clergy, and the bards; the feminine models which divide primarily on biological lines and include maidens, mothers and witches as well as the enduring motif of the sovereignty goddess.

I discuss what we may term a 'native' version of Arthur – that is, texts not displaying the influence of either Geoffrey of Monmouth, the verse romances of Chrétien de Troyes, or the many other English and continental Arthurian adaptations – and explore how gender is used within a heroic and nostalgic genre to reflect an idealised Welsh past. Finally I focus on the three so-called 'Welsh romances', Welsh *translatio* of courtly French poems which likely originated at least partly from native tales. Here the inherent difficulty in reconciling the ideals of the native 'heroic' tradition and the continental 'chivalric' one, very much in fashion in the high middle ages, becomes most apparent. Through examining both explicit and subtextual ideologies within the texts, I show that the Welsh redactors were creating a consciously hybrid, Welsh product using facets of important literary genres.

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List of Abbreviations and Short Titles

AOW: *The Arthur of the Welsh* (eds. Bromwich, Jarman, Roberts, Cardiff 1991)

CG: *Cormac's Glossary* (ed. O'Donovan, Calcutta 1868)

CMCS: *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies/Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (1981-2013)

CO: *Culhwch ac Olwen*

DIAS: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

DEB: *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (ed. J.A. Giles, London 1842)

GPC: *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*

EETS: Early English Text Society

EWSP: *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Rowland, Woodbridge 1990)

HRB: *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ed. Reeve and Wright, Woodbridge 2007)

ITS: Irish Texts Society

JIAS: *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*

LAMA: *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages* (ed. Grout, Lodge, Pickord and Varty 1983)

LPBT: *Legendary Poems in the Book of Taliesin* (Haycock, Cardiff 2007)

MWM: *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Huws, Cardiff 2000)

TYP3: *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*, 3rd edition (Bromwich, Cardiff 2006)

UWP: University of Wales Press/Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru

ZCP: *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* (1897-2013)

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Introduction

The idea of approaching medieval literature with an eye toward gender stems from the emergence of feminist scholarship as a discipline in the latter half of the twentieth century. The work of Judith Butler, Peggy McCracken, Thelma Fenster and others, as well as the formation of the Medieval Feminist Newsletter by Roberta Krueger, Elizabeth Robertson, and E.Jane Burns in 1985, saw an awakening but contested interest in dismantling the acceptance of an image of medieval women that had survived virtually unchallenged for centuries. Over the decades the discipline, once a young and fiery revolutionary, has undergone a process of maturation, grown up and given birth to the occasionally-disreputable, equally progressive fields of 'masculine' and 'queer' studies, indeed, of 'gender studies' as a broad field and way of reading. The ultimate goal of these approaches is to reclaim a place for marginalised peoples within medieval texts, to find the perspectives previously erased and excluded from view.

The perspective of Welsh women was one such. A vision of Celtic women as wild, dangerous and untameable had a long history stemming from the Roman chroniclers, but by the nineteenth century the idealised image of a Welsh woman was grounded in extremes of religious piety: these later visions of Welsh feminine perfection are embodied in Mary Jones' walk across north Wales for a Bible, or the elegant simplicity of Ann Griffith's hymns. Wales in the early modern and Victorian periods was 'the land of white gloves,' its self-image formed of a pious, almost defiant goodness.¹ The attachment of patriotic movements to the folklore of their own history did not diminish the influence of the Nonconformist revival, but rather, the chapel provided a filter for the antiquarian interpretation of Welsh history. A modern reader, faced with Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Four Branches*, may be confused in some places as to what is actually happening in the story – the sexual exploits of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, for instance, were carefully edited for Victorian sensibilities. Welsh literature in general, while experiencing a kind of

¹ So integral was this notion that Ireland uses it for the title of his work on the history of crime in Wales. See Richard W. Ireland, *Land of White Gloves?: A History of Crime and Punishment in Wales* (London 2015).

revival, was edited to fit within the standards of a polite, religious, and often prudish society. Editors and translators of Welsh texts had challenge enough in recovering their native literature and achieving for it a level of respectability; reclaiming the voices of its women was hardly their chief priority.

When the Welsh women were examined, the early twentieth-century Celticists mediated them through knowledge of Irish literary women, on whom there was more information. The work of Tomás Ó Máille on Medb of the Ulster Cycle was groundbreaking. By framing her actions as the remains of a shadowy ancient goddess he could restore much of her reputation from the beating it had taken through the centuries by medieval monastic writers, not to mention the Victorian ones.² This glimpse into a distant, misty Celtic past appealed to romantic sensibilities as much as scholarly ones, and the solar-god theory was enthusiastically taken up by the scholars who followed, presenting Rhiannon, Modron and Morgan as the surviving shadows of ancient maternal goddess-figures. And here the investigation of medieval Welsh women stalled. The lack of written record detailing the lives and contributions of actual historical women, and the difficulties in dating, translating, and interpreting the few surviving Welsh texts, pushed other concerns to the forefront, and the euhemerisation theory remained virtually unchallenged until the 1980s. Meanwhile, much work was being done looking at literary women in the texts of Ireland, England, France, Germany, the Low Countries and the Nordic ones while Wales concentrated on the unique problems presented by limited surviving texts and linguistic uncertainty. Therefore, works like Dorsey Armstrong's analysis of women in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* or Carolyne Larrington's *King Arthur's Enchantresses* emphasise the origins and attributes of female Arthurian characters without a Celtic context.

If feminist scholarship is a recent field, the study of masculinity is younger still. This is not to say that men have been at all excluded from studies of literature and history, but that maleness is assumed in the bulk of it – maleness, in conjunction with the dominant social, ethnic and economic

2 Ó Máille, Tomás. 'Medb Chruachna,' *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 17 (1928) 129-46.

majority, has provided the baseline for the study of most of human history. Medieval European history, as it was studied for centuries, was a man's history; more than that it was the history of politically-active men of the aristocratic classes and members of other groups who managed to be included must be exceptional. Men have been considered within the field of history not for themselves, but as the dominant segment of society, despite the disparities of time, class, and vocation. Meanwhile, as medieval woman was considered a defective man, not quite fully formed into the ultimate male potential, so have women in literature either been studied and measured against the baseline of the genderless male, or removed to a separate fishbowl to be dissected without reference to the masculine at all. As men and women have lived beside each other for the entire span of human existence, notions of masculine and feminine really must be considered together in order to be fully understood. In literature as in life, so much of both are built on reactions to the threats and promises, whether real or perceived, from the other. As Karras observes, 'we cannot understand women's lives without understanding men as men (as opposed to men as the normative humans, the traditional focus of historical study)'.³ Thelma Fenster, in her introduction to *Medieval Masculinities*, adds

As that reductive narrative obscured the many, flattening diversity and failing to record difference, obliterating *men as men*, it projected the local, the gendered, and the temporally bounded onto a universal, genderless, and atemporal screen, willingly ignoring the power imbalances thus served. In that way women were rendered invisible, but, ironically enough, so were gendered men.⁴

The problem is not that men are not being paid enough attention. Rather, it is the problems inherent in accepting the male as a historical or literary standard of measurement; by establishing 'man' as a homogenous norm, it erases any hint of alterity. Therefore, this is not a study of men *or* women, but of *men and women*, with all that it entails: obligations, responsibilities and relationships within the family, within society, and within the world. It would be impossible, within the constraints of a doctoral thesis and quite possibly of a lifetime's work, to thoroughly examine all possible aspects of

3 Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia 2003) p. 19.

4 Fenster, Thelma. 'Why Men?' *Medieval Masculinities — Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara, eds. (Minneapolis & London 1994) xv-xxvi p. x.

gender in medieval Welsh literature, but by focusing on specific generically-imposed models and building on the work of others – Roberta Valente, Fiona Winward, Marged Haycock, Helen Fulton, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, and Kirstie Chandler, among others – I hope to lay at least a serviceable foundation. The focus of this work is to examine the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed by medieval Welsh redactors, and how those constructions vary according to genre. As native Arthurian tales come into contact with the surrounding cultures, reinterpreting and reinterpreted by French or Anglo-Norman writers and reintroduced into Wales during a tumultuous and anxiety-laden period for Welsh identity, both native and foreign portrayals of men and women adapt to reflect the tensions of author and audience. It is one of the most notorious and challenging features of medieval Welsh literature that the tales pre-date the manuscripts, but even this difficulty can be used to our advantage when we see the aspects of early Wales that the thirteenth-century redactors wanted to preserve for posterity. The ancient, heroic Wales they preserved in their pages reflects their own varied interests, but also their favoured image of their own past – a past in which Welsh kings and Welsh warriors are leaders and victors, and their own ancient traditions are placed firmly as major players on the greater European stage.

The texts included here are selected to display the variations and conflicts within genres. The first section deals with genres we may term 'heroic' and 'romantic', of which gender is a crucial differentiating feature. I then lay out the models of masculinity used by medieval Welsh writers: the competing ideological constructs of the heroic and chivalric warrior, the *clergie* who conducted their battles on a higher spiritual plane, and the poets, who seem both willing and expected to transgress gender boundaries. I then turn to the feminine models, divided up primarily on biological lines and including maidens, mothers, and witches. Finally, I discuss the enduring motif of the sovereignty goddess in Celtic scholarship.

The second section deals with what we may term a 'native' version of Arthur – that is, texts not displaying the influence of either Geoffrey of Monmouth, the verse romances of Chrétien de

Troyes, or the many other English and continental Arthurian adaptations. The first chapter focuses on *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the earliest Arthurian prose tale, and explores the gendered portrayal of the monstrous, issues of motherhood and fosterage, and the notion of the beard as a masculine signifier on par with genitalia in importance – and like genitalia, subject to an emasculating and humiliating removal in certain circumstances. The second chapter in this section is the only one to include poetry, providing (as in Chandler) a context in which to situate the prose texts; *Preiddeu Annwn* and *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* are thematically linked to *Culhwch*, which appears to engage them in a deliberate intertextual conversation. *Preiddeu Annwn*, taking place explicitly in a remote Otherworld, raises questions about humanity, spirituality and control, while *Pa gur*, in referencing episodes attested in other contexts, lays out a definition of what makes Arthur's companions 'guir goreu im bid'.⁵ The focus in both cases, as in *Culhwch*, appears on the collective masculine endeavours of the *teulu*. In this chapter I explore the heroic model as presented within the texts, and the significance and possible sources for some of the motifs found therein.

The final part focuses on the three so-called 'Welsh romances', Welsh adaptations of courtly French poems which may have originated at least partly from native tales. This chapter discusses the generic classification of the *rhamantau* themselves and the difficulties inherent in doing so. A close reading of each of the three texts then examines their relationship to each other and to the native texts, using portrayals of gender as a lens. I explore the influence of female characters on the formation of the identity of the male protagonist, the hero's inevitable exile into a hostile gendered landscape, and the reflection of crisis of identity upon the masculine (and occasionally feminine) body. Together, this collection of texts and the adaptation of their gendered and generic treatments provide insight into the shifting expectations and anxieties of the medieval Welsh literary world.

5 Sims-Williams, Patrick. 'The early Welsh Arthurian poems', *Arthur of the Welsh*, Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts, eds. (Cardiff 1991) 33-72 p. 40

Conflicting Genders, Conflicting Genres

'Boy or girl?' is still often the first question asked in response to modern parents' baby announcements. Even in casual conversation we are unable to conceptualise the idea of an unsexed body. From the first breath, the lack or presence of that x-chromosome will, even now, influence our place in the societal structure. In the extremely patriarchal societies of medieval Europe, where male authority was predicated at least in part on the ability to regulate the exchange and behaviour of women, both the performance of gender and its biological underpinnings could have a profound effect on daily life.⁶ The specific values attributed to gender – like other socially-constructed characteristics such as class – are flexible, according to not only the time and place in which they were constructed but other factors such as genre and intended audience. Who is receiving the text, and what were they expected to take away from it?

Sioned Davies has discussed in depth the performance of stories in the courts of medieval Wales, setting a scene in which 'y byddai'r gwrndawyr yn eistedd yn weddol ffurfiol wrth a byrddau, eithr wedi ymlacio ryw faint wedi'r bwyd a'r ddiod' – the entertainment portion of an otherwise formal gathering of the court.⁷ Episodes in the Four Branches suggest storytelling took place after a meal, and a long tradition exists of Arthur as a king who 'wolde neuer ete / Vpon such a dere day er hym deuised were / of sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale.'⁸ The oral nature of the Welsh Arthurian tales allows for variations in the text and structure, as well as for intertextual dialogues between the texts themselves.

The audience, then, is not terribly difficult to visualise. By contrast, the author is a more nebulous figure, a composite of a network of poets and storytellers and scribes who each made their

6 Rubin, Gayle. 'The traffic in women: notes on the "political economy" of sex,' *Toward an Anthology of Women*, ed. Rayner R. Reiter (New York & London 1973) 157-210.

7 Davies, Sioned. *Crefft y Cyfarwydd* (Cardiff 1995) p. 35. '...the listeners sitting fairly formally at the tables, but somewhat relaxed after food and drink.'

8 Barron, W. R. J., ed. and trans. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Manchester 1974, repr. 1998) p. 36. '...[he] would never eat upon such a festive day before he had been told a novel tale of some perilous incident....' Trans. p. 37.

mark on the popular tales. While panegyric poets and some manuscript compilers enthusiastically claim their works, the concept of the author does not appear to be a matter of concern in Welsh prose texts. Not only are the stories themselves anonymous, but the narrative voice is external and primarily omniscient; there are no editorial asides or engagement with the purported audience as appear in Chrétien de Troyes or Marie de France. This can lead to speculation on the part of scholars, some more plausible than others, but also allows for a wide variety of possible interpretations and avenues of discussion.⁹ The mobility of medieval stories can lead to a number of coterminous but divergent versions – a result especially explicit in the versions of *Peredur*. These different versions of similar or cognate tales reflect the changing discursive priorities, anxieties, desires and ideology of medieval audiences and redactors.

Within the competing ideologies of heroic and courtly texts, attitudes toward gender are in fact among of the most crucial differentiating features. This marker intersects with others, including class, linguistic, and religious dimensions, for example, to compose a group of highly complex texts populated by equally complex characters. While medieval attitudes imposed a binary nature on sex and gender, this is easily destabilised, and gender models can contain multiple models: Gaunt observes the dichotomy of Eve and Mary, of *chevalerie* and *clergie*, and notes that sometimes the opposite of man is not woman or not-man, but rather another type of man.¹⁰ While *Culhwch ac Olwen* spends little time exploring these tensions, the other texts discussed here engage with it quite directly, from the Taliesin figure berating the ignorance of monks in *Preiddeu Annwn* to the acknowledgement in *Gereint* that the court considers tournaments a poor replacement for actual warfare.

Medieval society took its cue from the early church, which in turn owed much of its gender philosophy to the legacy of Aristotle. He supposed that since in most animal species the male is the

9 For a 'less plausible' example, Andrew Breeze proposes Gwenllïan ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan of Deheubarth as the author of the Four Branches. Breeze, Andrew, *The Origins of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi* (Leominster 2009).

10 Gaunt, Simon. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 1995) p. 12.

larger and more agile, that masculine superiority was the natural order of the universe, and to question it would be detrimental to the entire community.¹¹ It owed even more to Augustine, often credited with giving 'definitive form to Christian fear of sex and women' amongst ascetics.¹² Ambrose, Jerome, and Tertullian also developed the theology of gender, expanding on the writings of St Paul and placing women's fallen nature at the centre of a doctrine of sexual sin. The words of women were cause for anxiety amongst religious men, who pointed to the examples of Eve or Delilah, tempting their male lovers by kind words and kisses into betraying their higher religious calling, or by Salome, whose power to make men do as she asked led to the death of John the Baptist.

This is particularly important since the distinction between action and speech is one of the fundamental discourses of medieval gender studies. Men act, women speak, and while certain texts challenge this dichotomy in different ways it remains fundamental to the understanding of the literature. It occurs frequently throughout medieval Welsh literature, and neither is universally recognised as being more powerful than the other — action must be tempered with wisdom, and sometimes speech must be set aside in favour of a more direct approach. The wisest men, in Arthurian literature and Welsh tales in general, know when to rely on each as well as when to take others' counsel. Pwyll of the First Branch, headstrong and impetuous, has not the power of speech or intellect demonstrated by either Arawn or Rhiannon, but through his experiences with both of them he learns to listen, and when to heed advice. In the Second Branch, Bendigeidfran attempts to secure an alliance with Ireland first by offering up Branwen and then by negotiation, but when these strategies fail, he is prepared to take decisive measures against the threat to his realm.

Within the medieval Welsh corpora are a number of examples of women's verbal powers, some of which will be discussed in more detail through the course of this work. Valente finds that 'where the women are less physically active, they are more outspoken, their verbal acts having

11 Aristotle, *Politics*. Richard McKeon, ed. and trans. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York 1941, repr. 2001) p. 33.

12 Cooper, Kate and Conrad Leyser, 'The gender of grace: impotence, servitude, and manliness in the fifth-century West.' *Gender & History* 12:3 (2000) 536-551, p. 540.

nearly as much power and effect on the men as a quick blow to a sensitive part of the anatomy.'¹³ Culhwch's stepmother's impetuous curse on him holds the weight of sorcery; although she is neither a rationalised Otherworld figure nor attributed with any magical powers, her words are nevertheless so tangibly effective as to impel the plot of the text. Aranrhod of the Fourth Branch denies her son Lleu any adult existence, also by verbal means; her declaration that he will never have a name, arms or a wife plays out in a very real way. In the First Branch, Rhiannon's punishment for alleged infanticide includes a verbal component which appears to serve her well, and in the Third Branch, Manawydan's courtship of her is entirely focused on their conversation. In *Gereint*, when the hero succumbs to fears about his wife's fidelity, his first and most insistent demand is for her silence.

The power of female speech is also very well attested in Irish, which includes, in its far larger surviving corpus, a satisfyingly large number of lively female characters. The eighth-century Irish tale *Fled Bricrenn* (*Bricriu's Feast*) even includes a verbal competition between the wives of several famous heroes: '...each woman drew back from the door, under the protection of her husband, and there began a war of words amongst the women of Ulaid.'¹⁴ Joanne Findon has analysed thoroughly the 'strength and verbal prowess' of Cú Chulainn's wife Emer, a character she observes is as close to a female speaking subject as appears in the Irish tradition.¹⁵ She finds that female speech in Irish, and the Ulster cycle in particular, acts as 'arcane discourse, legal contracts, advice, prophecy and place-naming' despite a textual insistence on maintaining women's object status.¹⁶

None of this, of course, is an exclusively Celtic phenomenon. One need only look at the character of Sheherezade in the *Thousand and One Nights* to see how powerful female speech can be in literature worldwide. Plutarch attributes the legendary beauty of Cleopatra to the idea that to 'converse with her had an irresistible charm, and her presence, combined with the persuasiveness of

13 Valente, Roberta Louise. *Merched y Mabinogi: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches*. Unpublished PhD, Cornell University, 1986 p. 98.

14 Gantz, Jeffrey, trans. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (New York 1981) 228. Gantz's translation is based on the Leiden and Edinburgh versions.

15 Findon, Joanne. *A Woman's Words* (Toronto 1997) p. 21.

16 Findon, p. 55.

her discourse and the character' brought men to their knees; and that 'there was sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased.'¹⁷

The ability of women's words to effect change in their world, family or circumstances can, then, take several forms. It may be purely mundane, if of course beauty and persuasiveness can be considered mundane – Sheherezade's prowess as a storyteller, the charms of Cleopatra, and the lively conversation with which Rhiannon entrances Manawydan would fall into this category. It may have the connotation of a magic spell or the infliction of a *tynged* or *geas*, as on Lleu by Aranrhod and Culhwch by his stepmother. Or it may be realised in prayer, as in wealth of hagiographical texts in which pious young virgins are protected, restored, or otherwise safeguarded. Its importance is this: in a world where female movement is curtailed and controlled, where women seldom venture from their own home ground, they are denied the capacity for aggressive physical action. Speaking *is* their action. Mary Louise Pratt, utilising the speech act theory developed by Austin and Searle, categorises these 'illocutionary acts' as 'performative utterances,' capable of facilitating actual change.¹⁸ Searle clarifies the variant aspects of such speech acts even further, into a number of types including 'directives,' which include requests, commands, and invitations and are targeted at convincing a person to do a thing, and 'declarations,' which bring about the state of affairs to which they refer – blessing, for example, baptising, passing sentence...or 'fixing a fate'.¹⁹ Sioned Davies has found that dialogue scenes ('*ymddiddan*') in Welsh texts can be used to impel the plot forward or to convey news, personal stories and memories between characters within a text.²⁰ In particular, she notes that a flair for witty speech was socially important and especially associated

17 Plutarch, Life of Antony (XXVII.2-3) *Plutarch Lives VII*, trans. by Bernadette Perrin (Cambridge MA 1916) p. 197

18 Pratt, Mary Louise. *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, IN 1977) pp. 80-81. For discussion of speech act theory and its relationship to literature also see Pratt, 'Ideology and speech-act theory,' *Poetics Today* 7:1 (1986) 59-72; Stanley Fish, 'How to do things with Austin and Searle: speech act theory and literary criticism', *Modern Language Notes* 91:5 (1976) 983-1025; and Thomas Bredsdorff, 'Speech and theory and saga studies,' *Representations* 100:1 (2007) 34-41.

19 Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory*, pp. 80-81.

20 Davies, Sioned. *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, p. 190.

with girls.²¹

The pitfalls of attempting too much literary analysis with speech act theory have been discussed by other scholars, and in many ways it is unsuited to literary criticism.²² Rather than attempt to force an ill-fitting partnership between theory and text, it is enough to recognise that speech is in and of itself an action, and that in medieval literature it is often, but not exclusively, a female action. Male characters can and do construct themselves into speaking subjects in a way female ones can not, but masculine-constructed characters are less likely to depend on their skill as wordsmiths to arrange the world to their own liking. Even this depends on the model of gender into which the character fits, particular in the case of the poets, who are a striking exception to a good many rules. Nor does this mean that masculine warrior character are mutes (excepting the sentinels of *Preiddeu Annwn*): they will question, threaten, advise or otherwise speak as much as anyone. Certainly they will boast of their deeds and martial prowess. However, speaking is for these characters (and again, this boundary blurs when poetry is involved) merely a thing they do, and not the most important thing; their method of solving their problems will most often ultimately involve force. Women, whether mundane or magical, must resort to verbal means. The masculine exception to this rule belongs to the boundary-crossing, gender-bending figure of the bard.

The inescapable irony inherent in the power attributed to female speech in literature is, of course, that the words are put in their mouths by men – specifically by clergymen who have not only rejected a life alongside women but have been dogmatically conditioned to distrust them. There are also examples of male (and presumably male) poets taking on a female narrative persona; Heledd is likely one such, and Arthurian examples include the poems 'Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer' in the Red Book of Hergest and 'Ymddiddan Melwas a Gwenhwyfar' in Llanstephan 122.²³ Feminist scholars have, over the last several decades, shown how women in a

21 Davies, Sioned. *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, p. 189.

22 See Fish, also Michael Hancher's review of Pratt, 'Beyond a speech-act theory of literary discourse', *Modern Language Notes* 92:5 (1977) 1081-1098.

23 The dialogue of Melwas and Gwenhwyfar is fragmented and unclear; it has been suggested Arthur and Cai may have speaking parts as well as (or instead of) Melwas. See Mary Williams, 'An early ritual poem in Welsh,' *Speculum* 13:1 (1938) 38-51. It is rare however to have three speakers in a dialogue poem. See Ian Hughes, 'Camlan,

text are constructed as object, rather than subject, and used as a canvas for the projection of the male hero's (or writer's) anxieties and desires.²⁴ As Tuttle Hansen observes of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, the 'anxieties of (masculine) identity are strategically displaced onto Woman, and women are fixed...in opposition, silence, and difference'.²⁵ Edith Benkov has argued in a study of female speech in Old French literature that the tradition reflects a 'fundamental belief that women are able manipulators of language and that their skill can only be construed as threatening to the established order'.²⁶ Simon Gaunt, however, finds that female characters are equally likely to be used to support the status quo, and thus their own oppression; he attributes this simultaneously to male fantasy on the part of writers, and women's own internalisation of misogynistic cultural tendencies.²⁷

Within the following texts, we shall see examples of both male and female characters who use speech and action to question and deconstruct their gender performance as well as those who exemplify the conventional attributes of their assigned roles. Both speech and silence can be used to establish, develop and subvert the characters' identities, relationships and position within the texts' social spaces

Medrawd a Melwas,' *Dwned* 13 (2007) 11-46.

24 Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca 1985), p. 22. See also Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London 1985) 127-49, and Joanne Findon, *A Woman's Words* (Toronto 1997) pp. 4-6

25 Tuttle Hansen, Elaine. 'Fearing for Chaucer's good name,' *Exemplaria* 2:1 (1990) 23-36, p. 33.

26 Benkov, Edith Joyce. 'Language and women: from silence to speech,' *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, eds. Julian Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse 1989) 245-268, p. 264.

27 Gaunt, Simon. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 1995) p. 81.

Genre in Medieval Welsh Literature

Categorisation of texts on generic lines dates back at least as far as Plato and Aristotle, and despite the assertion of structuralist scholars such as Zumthor that the medieval writers had no concept of genre as we might understand it today – claiming instead that classification would have been along linguistic lines as Latin or vernacular texts – it is in fact one of the most basic tools for understanding texts.²⁸ Gaunt argues that, rather than being unaware of genre, early critics neglected to address it not because it was unimportant or useless, but because it was 'considered so obvious it need no discussion'.²⁹

At its heart, genre is a communication between writer (or storyteller) and audience which informs them, even before the reader or listener has embarked upon the story's journey, in what direction it intends to sail. While story types allow for certain twists and turns of plot and subversion of expectation, we all know that a tragedy will end in death, a comedy will make us laugh. The expectations set by generic markers have evolved to form publishers' standards, but they are not new concepts.

Jameson describes two often conflicting generic tendencies, which he characterises as *semantic* and *syntactic*.³⁰ The first is concerned primarily with content, or with a 'general or universal attitude towards life or form of being-in-the-world,' while the second is structural, suggesting that a type will have 'precise laws and requirements of its own' by which it can adhere to a particular literary model.³¹ Having confessed the strengths and weaknesses of each he then suggests, quite correctly, that both approaches are necessary to a thorough understanding of the generic considerations – and thereby the audience's expectations – of a given text. Jauss articulates the combination by describing genre as 'content given form', thus distinguishing disparate genres which use the same form.³² In medieval Wales, both *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Chwedl Iarlles y*

28 Zumthor, Paul. *Essai de Poétique Médiévale* (Paris 1981) pp. 239-43.

29 Gaunt, Simon. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 1995) p. 4.

30 Jameson, Fredric, 'Magical narratives: romance as genre,' *New Literary History* 7:1 (1975) 135-163, p. 136.

31 *ibid.* p. 136-7.

32 Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1982) p. 88.

Ffynnon are prose texts about Arthur's knights, but in each, the characters and action are constructed within a particular generic context. Jauss presents an idea I will come back to repeatedly during the course of this analysis: the 'horizon of expectation' of the audience, which Gaunt and Kay explain 'would encompass a particular ideologically charged configuration of form and content' which could be confirmed or subverted by the text.³³ This formed a cultural horizon which, like the terrestrial one, is constantly challenged and displaced.³⁴ It refers to the preconceived, internalised notions a reader brings when approaching a text and includes an understanding of backstory, references, allusions and contexts which the original intended audience might be presumed to have.

In medieval Wales, the compilation of surviving manuscripts certainly suggests an understanding of, if not always a preoccupation with, division of texts along thematic lines. The fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin focuses on poetry attributed to the legendary bard in any of his personae, while the Red and White Books both appear to divide texts according to functional generic criteria: religious or historical texts are grouped together, as are medical works, poetry, and in both cases, material having to do with Charlemagne. For the Arthurian texts, however, this is not an entirely reliable method of division. The fact that that *Peredur*, *Iarlles y Ffynnon* and *Gereint* are not grouped together by redactors has been one of the recurring arguments in medieval Welsh studies against considering them together³⁵ – rather, *Gereint* in both the Red and White Book manuscripts directly precedes *Culhwch ac Olwen*, while *Owein* and *Peredur* are part of a group including the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, *Breuddwyd Macsen*, and *Lludd a Llefelys*. A number of possible reasons for this present themselves: the immediate proximity of a text to the scribe, for instance; his own personal preference or that of his patron; or an ideological configuration not immediately transferable to our modern parameters. A pseudo-chronological division may certainly

33 Gaunt, Simon. 'Romance and other genres,' *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge 2000) 45-59, p. 46.

34 *ibid.* Gaunt, Simon and Susan Kay, 'Introduction,' *Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 2008) p. 8.

35 Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen. 'Medieval Welsh tales or romances? Problems of genre and terminology,' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 47 (2004) 42-58, p 42. With regard to the spelling of Middle Welsh names, I use here the orthography of the edited texts rather than the modern Welsh versions – Gereint, Owein, and so on.

be possible, as the latter group all take place within a far-distant past, in the Old North or the days of Rome – an early Britain with a set terminus, while *Culhwch* and *Gereint*, which appear adjacent in the two major manuscripts, are more ambiguous or flexible in their temporal contexts. The Red Book in particular seems to take a certain historical approach to its contents. It is also true that notions of genre can evolve over time, and a text may be considered an example of one or another genre by transmitters in one period, and not another.

Most contemporary references to generic configuration are reserved for poetry, with a wide range of forms and material – elegy and panegyric, religious verse, legend and prophecy – but prose criticism by redactors, as Haycock and others have noted, is sparse.³⁶ Some division has been made, particularly by Alwyn and Brinley Rees, into certain types derived from narrative devices in the Irish tradition: births, youthful exploits (*'mabinogi'*), wooings, elopements, adventures, voyages, and deaths.³⁷ These differences, however, are not of genre but rather of plot and content, as all of these events might occur within a single cycle, to a single character: the world, ethical systems and fundamental characters of Fionn mac Cumhaill or Cú Chulainn remain relatively consistent throughout a cycle which might naturally include everything through birth, marriage, adventures and death. The world portrayed in Welsh prose literature does change; Pwyll and Rhiannon could hardly exchange places with Gereint and Enid. Only a few characters – Arthur, Owain ab Urien, and Cai, for instance – survive transplanting.

The translators and adapters who shaped their texts for a native audience, however, worked within particular contexts and familiar horizons, in which 'native narrative formulas are used ... and abstract and psychological reflection and the finer points of *courtoisie* are pruned in favour of action'.³⁸ Even these texts, however – a small surviving collection – are hardly hegemonic in their approach. Not only are boundaries between genres flexible, but textual attitudes toward discourses

36 Haycock, Marged. 'Literary criticism in Welsh before 1300,' *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. II: *The Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2005) 333-344, p. 333. Also see Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Cambridge 1990) pp. 281-7 and Barry J. Lewis, *Genre a Genres ym Marddoniaeth Grefyddol y Cynfeirdd a'r Gogynfeirdd*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Aberystwyth University (2004).

37 Rees, Alwyn, and Brinley Rees. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London 1961).

38 Haycock, 'Literary criticism,' p. 333.

of subjectivity, ethnicity, class, and (most importantly for this project) gender are varied, subtle and challenging.

This work is concerned primarily with two generic distinctions, each centred around a particular ethical system: the 'heroic' ethos of the poetry of the *cynfeirdd* and the 'courtly' ones imported and adapted from the influential French romances of the twelfth century. With the exceptions of the Arthurian poems *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn*, it will focus on particular prose texts, exploring the differences between works apparently composed within a purely native *milieu* and those informed by proximity to French and Anglo-Norman traditions.

The chief and obvious difficulty lies first of all in defining the archetypal characteristics of either genre, when they exist in such diverse and multivalent forms. While much ink has been spilt on establishing definitions, categories, and signposts, a hesitant consensus sees each as stemming from a particular unique ideology – Jauss's category of semantic genre. The terms are particularly fraught when divorced from the forms with which they are most associated, but not all heroic texts are epics (a form which has its own structural rules) and not all romances are rhyming couplets. Scholarship dealing with the 'semantic' of Jauss's classifications has, however, admitted varying degrees of flexibility regarding form and even content, provided that a text participates in and engages with the value system from which the generic distinction is drawn.³⁹

How, then, do we define these systems? Most simply, heroic literature reflects an often-primitive culture of warlords and their retainers who spend their evenings roaring in a mead-hall, while romance shoulders the ideals and responsibilities of *courtoisie*, knights in shining armour and damsels in distress. One tradition grew out of the Homeric epic of the ancient Greeks, the other was thought to have made a sudden appearance in the poetry of Languedoc in the late eleventh century, and both carried on, changeable but unstoppable, for centuries after.⁴⁰

39 Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay, eds. in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 2008) p. 11.

40 Ker, W.P. *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (New York 1957) p. 8; Lewis, C.S. *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford 1936) p. 2.

Criticism has been levelled, justifiably, at the idea that a homogeneous 'heroic' age ever spanned all of Europe, or even occurred at all, but the idea (independent of historical reality) that a 'Heroic Age was the earliest period of which memory survived', which constructed and reflected a nostalgic ideal, remains relevant.⁴¹ Likewise, the possibility that chivalric ideals were in any way reflective of real life has been thoroughly dismantled, but this, too, can shed light on the discursive priorities of medieval writers.

Below I will address some of the fundamental aspects of heroic and romantic literature, and where they appear in the traditions of medieval Wales. More specific analysis of medieval Welsh engagement with gendered topics in each genre will be discussed in the relevant chapters. Finally, I will discuss certain features that both genres appear to hold in common.

Heroic Literature

Much of the modern understanding of a 'heroic' genre of literature is much indebted to the influence of the Chadwicks' *The Growth of Literature*. That they did, perhaps, lend the annals more credence for historicity than they deserve – suggesting that the British 'heroic age' belongs to the sixth century, the age of Taliesin and Aneirin according to the *Historia Brittonum*, bookended by Arthur in the fifth century and Cadwallon in the seventh – does not invalidate the use of the term where these markers apply.⁴² The construction of an nostalgic portrait of an idealised past, complete with kings, princes, and great warriors, need not have really happened for us to see how a culture chooses to portray those ideals. The kings of the Old North may or may not resemble the versions of themselves immortalised in poetry, but we can see how they wanted to be remembered, or rather, how the poets, either contemporary or in later days, wanted them remembered.

Rather than discussing heroic literature as a product of *form*, whether alliterative verse, Homeric formula, or *englyn*, it is perhaps more productive to focus on a heroic ethos as a set of

41 Chadwick, H. Munrow and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, vol. I (Cambridge 1932) p. 14.

42 *ibid.* p. 16.

conventions and expectations attributed to narrative device. These conventions appear in a diverse range of cultural contexts, from the tribes described in Tacitus's *Germania*, to Anglo-Saxon chronicle and epic, Middle Welsh panegyric, and the *chansons de geste* of medieval France. In medieval Wales as well as England, Rowland notes that

questions about the nature and limits of heroism, the role of fate and self-determination, wisdom and courage are pervasive in literature which can only be described as heroic. The clearest way of detecting the role of genre...is by comparing the works of the Cynfeirdd and Gogynfeirdd. The panegyric of court poets continued to serve the same social function, presenting and upholding the heroic code with a similar purity to that seen in the earliest *hengerdd*.⁴³

Central to the ethical discourse of heroism is loyalty between men: the loyalty of a lord to his war-band, of retainers to their lord, and of warriors to each other. Conflicts of allegiance can and do complicate narratives when competing loyalties pull a man to choose between bonds of fealty and those of kinship. The reciprocal nature of generosity is integral to this loyalty. A lord must be generous in rewarding loyalty with gifts and treasure in order to build up his reputation and attract the best warriors; those warriors likewise build their own reputations by demonstrating valour and loyalty in their lord's service.

For instance Arthur, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, is so generous to his retainers that he runs out of gifts for them; when more knights flock to his banner than he is capable of compensating it necessitates a push for war against the Saxons to refill the treasure chests and reward loyal friends.⁴⁴ Likewise, in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Arthur reminds Cai that 'ydym wyrda hyt tra yn dygyrcher. Yd ytuo mwyhaf y kyuarws a rothom, mwyuwy uyd yn gwrdaaeth ninheu ac an cret ac an hetmic.'⁴⁵ Praise poems to the native Welsh princes and their *uchelwyr* successors foreground the generosity of these patrons, both to those who fight with them and those bards who compose verse in their honour. In a discussion of heroic ethics in Old English poetry, O'Keefe observes that

43 Rowland, *EWSP*, p. 37.

44 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* IX:143, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge 2007) pp. 192-93. 'As a newly-crowned king, he displayed his customary open-handedness. Such a crowd of knights flocked to him that he ran out of gifts....Arthur, who was both upright and generous, decided on war against the Saxons, to use their wealth to reward his household retainers.'

45 Bromwich, Rachel and D. Simon Evans. *Culhwch ac Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff 1992) p. 7-8. 'We are noblemen as long as others seek us out. The greater the gifts we bestow, the greater will be our nobility and our fame and our honour.' Davies, Sioned. *The Mabinogion* (Oxford 2007) p. 183.

in Old English heroic poetry, warfare is the counterpoint to scenes of feasting and treasure-giving, that the two are reciprocal and intertwined; this is equally true in Welsh.⁴⁶ The warriors of *Y Gododdin* 'paid for their mead-feast with their lives' ('gwerth eu gwledd o fedd fu eu henaid' ()), and this is portrayed as honourable; similarly the five-day battle between the Danes and Frisians in the Old English fragment of the Battle of Finnsburgh is a just payment for their lord's 'white mead'.⁴⁷ Tacitus also makes references to generosity and feasting being linked with loyalty in the *Germania*, and of course the mead-hall of *Beowulf* is one of its most iconic images.

Intrinsic to this notion of building reputation is the pursuit of lasting glory. This too is common to heroic traditions in multiple cultures, exemplified with exquisite succinctness by the Anglo-Saxon maxim, 'Dom biþ selast' ('Glory is best').⁴⁸ In Welsh the most ready example is *Y Gododdin*, in which the slaughter of an entire war-band is mitigated by the poet's assertion that their names will live on. For obvious reasons, it is also a recurring theme in elegy. It is both expressed and challenged to great effect in the Llywarch Hen cycle, suggesting with clarity that this was an ethical system the Welsh poets understood well, both in shining ideal and terrible practice. This *englyn* cycle features Llywarch himself, the elderly lord, pressuring his youngest son Gwên into conforming to an entirely impractical ideal by telling him, 'O diegyd ath welif / oth ry ledir ath gwynif / na choll wyneb [gwr] ar gnif' ('If you escape I will see you / If you are killed I will lament you / Do not lose the honour of a warrior despite battle hardship').⁴⁹ Throughout the dialogue, the father wears down the son until the latter's death is all but inevitable. While the poem itself appears to engage with notions of the heroic ideal and directly challenge them through Gwên, Rowland rightly contends that 'even if the poet himself had been moved to a new consideration of the role of warfare in society, it is clear that Llywarch is the epitome of the old, unyielding school'.⁵⁰ According

46 O'Keefe, Katherine O'Brien. 'Values and ethics in heroic literature.' *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, 2nd ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, eds. (Cambridge 2013) 101-119, p. 103.

47 *Y Gododdin*, ln. 340. In A.O.H. Jarman, *Y Gododdin: Britain's Oldest Heroic Poem* (Llandysul 1990), pp. 24-25. O'Keefe, 'Values and ethics', p. 103.

48 *Maxims* I:80. In George Philip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (New York 1936) p. 159.

49 Rowland, Jenny. *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Woodbridge 1990) p. 404. Trans. p. 468.

50 Rowland, *EWSP* p. 14-15.

to the very ideas he espouses, those who survive to grow old are not the strongest, but the weakest, and rather than seek a glorious young end himself, he attempts to deny his changing role. Therefore, the irony and tragedy of the poem, and the *marwnad* for Gwên which follows it, is that Llywarch himself, having lived past the age of usefulness in battle, is now excluded from precisely the value system he clings to, while Gwên, who says bitterly, 'ny bu eidyl hen yn was,' when accused of cowardice, is immortalised with his companions.⁵¹ But heroism is often tragic, its stanzas thick with descriptions of bloodshed, noble deaths, and last fatal charges.

Heroic convention, with its intense focus on feasts and battles, results in an extremely narrow worldview. As summarised by Jackson, 'it carries with it an implication of a social setting; a military aristocratic society...in which the real *raison d'être*, and the chief interest, of the nobility is warfare....'⁵² Concerned with glory, loyalty and vengeance, it leaves no room for distraction – not only does it exclude any competing discourse, but any external motivation or signs of life are ignored. One of the most significant differences between heroic and romantic literature is a focus on the individual character as a part of a world which happens, however inconsistently, around him. In Welsh heroic poetry, as Nora Chadwick observes, 'they have no conception of a state, or of politics, or of a policy. Their warfare and their enemies are...personal'.⁵³ The society exists only as a thing the *teulu* must defend; there is no sense that anything meaningful or important happens off the battlefield.

Characters constructed in a heroic mould (which will be discussed in more detail below) can, however, be picked up and transplanted from one text, or type of text, to another. This occurs quite visibly with Arthur's steward Cai, whose participation in a heroic value system displays tension when translated into the *milieu* of romance. This leads, as shall be shown, to his being displayed in certain chivalric texts as an example of ill behaviour. Even Arthur himself does not

51 Rowland, *EWSP*, p. 406. 'No old man was a weakling in his youth,' p. 469. See *EWSP* chapter 1, 'The Llywarch Hen poems,' for further discussion of the role of heroic ethics in the cycle as well as forthcoming work by Michaela Jacques.

52 Jackson, Kenneth Hurlstone. *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh 1969) p. 38.

53 Chadwick, Nora. *The British Heroic Age: The Welsh and the Men of the North* (Cardiff 1976) p. 71.

survive the transition completely successfully. The Arthur of the early Welsh poems and *Culhwch ac Olwen* – as well as of Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* – is lively and active, has conquered 'India Uawr a'r India Uechan...yr Affric, ac yr ynyssoed Corsica, ac yGhaer Brythwch a Brythach a Nerthach', takes on enemies in single combat and bounds energetically around Britain.⁵⁴ His personal participation in the activities of his war-band puts him in context; like Urien Rheged and the embattled princes of early medieval Wales, warfare is as much his domain as the halls of Caerleon.

Within this hyper-masculine setting, confined to mead-halls and battlefields, women are almost entirely absent. Chandler observes that 'the society [the warriors] form does not include women other than to establish a distant 'other' with which to define the terms of their macho society.'⁵⁵ There are lines which mention the grieving widows of fallen warriors, and some instances, such as the 'Pais Dinogad' poem in *Llyfr Aneirin* imply a maternal responsibility to impart the heroic ethos to their sons.⁵⁶ The single, significant exception to this policy of female exclusion is the wandering exile Heledd, the narrator of a poetic cycle mourning the loss of her family. What little narrative can be teased out of the poetry of *Canu Heledd* suggests the motif of conflicting loyalties which so often provide drama within the heroic genre was likely instrumental in the destruction of the house of Cynddylan and of Heledd's family.⁵⁷

A heroic ethos in medieval Welsh literature is necessarily portrayed differently from that found in other traditions, and it is a mistake to judge them by the standards of Homer or the composer of *Beowulf*. Differences in form and execution, however, do not negate the remarkably

54 Bromwich, Rachel and D. Simon Evans. *Culhwch ac Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff 1992) p. 5. 'India the Great and India the Lesser...Africa, and the islands of Corsica, and in Caer Brythwch and Brythach and Nerthach.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 182. While India, Africa and Corsica are familiar names, the locations of Caer Brythwch and Brythach and Nerthach are undetermined. See Bromwich and Evans, p. 59.

55 Chandler, Kirstie. *Masculinity in Medieval Welsh Literature*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales Aberystwyth () p. 35.

56 Haycock, Marged. "'Defnydd hyd Ddydd Brawd': rhai agweddau ar y ferch ym marddoniaeth yr oesoedd canol', *Cymru a'r Cymry 2000: Trafodion Cynhadledd Milflwyddiant Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru*, Geraint Jenkins, ed. (Aberystwyth 2001) 41-70, p. 44.

57 See Rowland, *EWSP*, pp. 142ff. I have also discussed Heledd's place in more detail in 'His mother did not raise a feeble son: Men, women and heroism in Welsh saga poetry and the englyn cycles,' *Proceedings of the Association of Celtic Studies of Ireland and Britain I and II*, Christopher Lewin and Sioned Fflur Rhys, eds. (Aberystwyth 2015) 67-76, pp. 72-73.

numerous common aspects. Medieval Wales 'does' heroism in a particular way, and while the lens is small, the resulting picture is a vibrant view of the way ideals of warfare, loyalty and courage play out in its unique context.

Romance and *fin' amor*

What the definition of heroic literature owes to the Chadwicks, the genre of romance owes to C.S. Lewis. The categoric markers have, of course, shifted over time, and related terms such as 'chivalry' and 'courtly love' have gone in and out of fashion. Sarah Kay observes that 'chivalric love,' the term used through much of the nineteenth century, places the male hero-lover at the centre of the narrative lens, while 'courtly love' more clearly demonstrates the link between the affair itself and the social setting in which it takes place. Meanwhile *fin' amor*, the actual contemporary term attested in Occitan poetry, emphasises the purity of the lovers' emotional involvement.⁵⁸

The convention appears to have made a sudden dramatic entrance in the troubadour poetry of southern France in the late eleventh century, and after spreading through Europe as thoroughly and permeatively as Arthur himself, was adapted for a number of linguistic and cultural forms and contexts. Its true nature has been a subject of scholarly debate for over a century, and it seems unlikely consensus will soon be reached; fortunately it is by now acknowledged that no single interpretation will suffice, and the variety of permutations in which chivalric and courtly values exist open up endless avenues of inquiry.⁵⁹

Gaston Paris, who first brought the term *amour courtois* into general use, attributed to romance a number of facets from Andreas Capellanus: heightened emotions brought on by the risk of discovery and adherence to a particular lover's code: the female beloved could make demands on

58 Kay, Sarah. 'Courts, clerks, and courtly love,' *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge 2000) 81-96, p. 85.

59 Like other unanswerable questions such as 'who wrote the Four Branches,' the fundamental question of 'what is *fin' amor*?' is orders of magnitude too vast to be dealt with thoroughly here, and I am of necessity leaving out a good number of theories and scholars which, while interesting, are irrelevant to the present argument. A good starting point is Robert Braose's *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Rowman and Littlefield 1977), followed by E. Jane Burns, 'Courtly love: who needs it? recent feminist work in the medieval French tradition,' *Signs* 27:1 (2001) 23-57.

her suitor as capriciously as she liked, while he was bound to oblige.⁶⁰ In the early twentieth century, Johan Huizinga advanced the notion that 'ideals, even if they are delusory and anachronistic, can have a civilising influence on the life, thought and art of a given epoch,' and that courtly love served precisely this function.⁶¹ A dozen years later, C.S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love* argued that courtly love was a submission to the tenets of Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and the Religion of Love.⁶² In the troubadour lyric and the *lais* of Marie de France, adultery played a significant role; in other varieties of romance, including the Welsh *rhamantau*, it is less visible if it occurs at all. The clearly problematic nature of an entire genre of literature based on what was a very serious crime inspired D. W. Robertson Jr. to argue for redefinition on the basis that medieval society could not have condoned such behaviour, let alone idealised it to such a degree.⁶³

Lewis also argued, maintaining the traditional view put forth by Paris, that the codification of love-service owed more to the feudal relationship between lord and vassal than to Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.⁶⁴ This led to Bloch's view, decades later, that the doctrine of courtly love conditioned the individual to accept the impersonal authority of the state.⁶⁵ Erich Köhler, following Moller, provided a Marxist interpretation which suggested romantic literature espousing idealised codes of love served to unite upper and lower classes⁶⁶, while Georges Duby focused on the effect of this same codification on the aristocratic *juvenes* of medieval France.⁶⁷ Peter Dronke challenges Lewis, arguing instead that in fact 'the feeling of *amour courtois* is not confined to courtly or chivalric society' nor was it at all 'new', but rather had a long tradition rooted in oral popular verse.⁶⁸ Feminist

60 Paris, Gaston. 'Etudes sur les romans de la table ronde,' *Romania* 12 (1883) 459-534. See also Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Trans. John Jay Parry. (New York 1990).

61 Broase, *Origin and Meaning*, p. 30, orig. Huizinga, Johan. *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. Trans. F. Hopman (Harmondsworth 1955, first ed. 1924).

62 Lewis, C.S. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. (Oxford 1936).

63 Robertson, Jr., D.W. 'The concept of courtly love as an impediment to the understanding of medieval texts,' *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.X. Newman (Albany, NY 1968) 1-18.

64 Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 2ff.

65 Bloch, Howard R. *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley 1977) pp 215-48.

66 Köhler, Erich, 'Observations historiques et sociologiques sur la poésie des troubadours,' *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 7 (1964) 27-51.

67 Duby, Georges. *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley 1977).

68 Dronke, Peter. *Medieval Latin and the Rise of the European Love-Lyric*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1965) vol. 1, p. ix.

critics denounced a fundamentally misogynistic literature which forefronted men's feelings at the expense of those of their lovers, 'staging vexed heterosexual liaisons between aristocratic couples', while others sought out the places where characters and narratives resisted courtly norms.⁶⁹ Among all of this debate, some consistent divisions and themes were finally revealed.

First, it is necessary to divide the 'courtly love' of the troubadours from the wider and more heterogenous discourse of *chevalerie*. While intertwined and often found within the same texts and traditions, they are not synonymous. Burns notes that 'courtliness...does not necessarily include the practice of love...general courtly conduct - *cortesia* in Occitan and *courtoisie* in Old French - can exist apart from courtly loving.'⁷⁰ She uses Lancelot and Gawain as examples: the first exemplifies *fin' amor*, while 'his utterly courtly but measured and honorable chivalric companion Gauvain, who is not "in love", exhibits only *courtoisie*.'⁷¹ Participation in the discourse of courtly love itself requires not only emotion or feelings of love, but adherence to a complex standard of expression and behaviour with which the medieval Welsh prose texts seem disinclined to engage. *Courtoisie* (Welsh *llyseiddrwydd*), however, has fewer rules, and a stronger focus on notions of honour and reputation than on erotic love. This, as I will later show, is where the *rhamantau* lie.

While early romances in French were composed in verse – primarily in octosyllabic rhyming couplets – this form was neither universal nor permanent, and Welsh versions are not the only ones to exist in prose. Furthermore, there are clear cultural differences between romance composed in France, in Italy, in Germany, and insular romance from Wales and England.⁷² Gaunt notes that 'the ideological resonance of Arthurian subject matter is so strong' that romantic texts remain recognisable as such despite their variations.⁷³ Certainly they were sufficiently distinguishable to lend themselves to ironic or parodic portrayals, from Chrétien's image of Lancelot fighting

69 Burns, E. Jane. 'Courtly love: who needs it? recent feminist work in the medieval French tradition,' *Signs* 27:1 (2001) 23-57, p. 23.

70 *ibid.* p. 29.

71 Burns, 'Courtly love,' p. 30.

72 Crane, Susan. *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*. (Berkeley 1986).

73 Gaunt, Simon. 'Romance and other genres,' *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge 2000): 45-59, p. 47.

backward to keep Guinevere in view, to Don Quixote tilting at windmills. The prevailing themes centre around a single chivalric hero, who must negotiate his position within the secular, political environment of the court through marriage, conquest or inheritance.⁷⁴ Like heroic literature, reputation and honour are of paramount importance, but the methods used to achieve these differ, as well as the standards by which they are judged.

Maurice Keen's study of chivalry in medieval history finds romantic and didactic texts alike attributing certain qualities to chivalric knights, noting repeated notions of 'prouesse, loyaute, largesse, courtoisie and franchise'.⁷⁵ Ramón Lull's thirteenth-century Catalan text, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, claimed that 'a knight must prize honour before all, and eschew pride, false-swearing, idleness, lechery and especially treason...he will be a man courteous and nobly spoken, well clad, one who holds open house within the limit of his means.'⁷⁶ This points to a method of behaviour by which the hero, necessarily of noble birth and status, can prove his quality even without revealing his name.

Chivalric romance takes a potential hero from the court to destabilise his identity and make him earn it again. He meets a stock cast of helpful or hostile characters along the way, including his destined lady-love, whose honour he will fight for. Susan Crane notes that examples of this type of romance 'emphasize love's power to transform heroic identity, and trace love's role in precipitating crises between private identity and public expectations', and certainly this recurs in Welsh.⁷⁷ Unlike the heroic genre discussed above, women are counted in the ethical system as more than objects of exchange: the female lover is mediator and metaphor for the hero's knightly identity, with which he constructs his own subjectivity. Gaunt argues that the changing roles of women, the individual, and love which are so prominent in romance are part of a renegotiation of sexuality amid the French aristocratic classes.⁷⁸ This likely provokes some of the differences between French and insular

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. (New Haven and London 1984, repr. 2005), p. 2.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 10.

⁷⁷ Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 13.

⁷⁸ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 74.

romance discussed by Crane in England and Fulton in Wales, as the cultural context of the continental tales is drastically unfamiliar to much of the British audience; Hemming takes this further to suggest the Welsh writers in particular kept in foreign elements in order to lend their tales an air of the exotic.⁷⁹

As Keen notes, 'in chivalrous romance...we meet again and again the figure of the young knight leaving home (or it may be Arthur's court), to prove himself in strange adventures.'⁸⁰ The land through which he traverses may be magical or strange, but the hero's ability to overcome challenges will be dependent on his adherence to the tenets of his chivalric status. He must endure a period of loss and exile, during which he is stripped of many of the outward signs of his true or potential identity – in *Owein* the hero becomes a wild man, while in both *Gereint* and *Peredur* the titular characters spend much of the narrative as peripatetic wanderers – and will likely refuse to give strangers his name. Only after undergoing a personal transformation and making amends for the situation which led to the loss in the first place will he be reintegrated into courtly society with a stable adult identity.

Both heroic and romantic literatures deal almost exclusively with the military ruling class. Fulton observes that the panegyric poetry of early Wales is 'surviving literature of the dominant social group, generally the dual patriarchal hegemony of a militaristic aristocracy and learned literate class'.⁸¹ They may be Arthur and his knights, Urien Rheged, his son Owein, or Llywarch Hen but the literature of early medieval Wales is hardly populist. This is attested in Irish literature as well, which concerns itself with sons and daughter of kings, many of whom are also unparalleled warriors. It is also true of Greek, English and Norse sagas. Where folklore may let millers' daughters and farmers' third sons rise to glory and riches, these are genres which fixate on the

79 Crane, *Insular Romance*, especially chapter 5. Fulton, Helen, 'Individual and society in *Owein/Yvain* and *Gereint/Erec*.' *The Individual in Celtic Literatures: CSANA Yearbook 1* (2001): 15-50. Hemming, Jessica. 'The curious case of the "Countess" in the Welsh romances.' Paper given at the Fourteenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Maynooth. 4 August 2011; personal communication.

80 Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 53.

81 Fulton, Helen. 'Cultural heroism in the Old North of Britain: the evidence of Aneirin's *Gododdin*.' *The Epic in History*, ed. Lola S. Davidson et al. Sydney Studies in Society and Culture, no. 11 (1994), 18-40, p 21.

warrior class. But where Simon Gaunt, drawing on the work of Erich Köhler, suggests that in French, both the tales of Roland and Lancelot are 'part of an escapist fantasy where kings need knights', the medieval Welsh princes very much needed their war-bands.⁸² Despite attempts by native princes at certain points in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to unite the small kingdoms of Wales into a single alliance, if not a single entity, the political landscape was one of constant raiding and low-level warfare between neighbours and kin-groups.

Likewise, both genres, especially in the Welsh tradition, are concerned with notions of reputation and status within the homosocial arena. The markers and methods of gaining and maintaining this status may differ, not only between genres but within them, as the texts themselves engage with the cultural anxieties surrounding shifts in the sociopolitical context. Is tournament-fighting an acceptable ground for gaining glory, or only warfare? How important is marriage to a stable adult identity, and what are the responsibilities of a knight to his wife? What happens when those responsibilities conflict with the obligations to his lord? These questions, presumably mediated by bardic storytellers and clerical redactors who observed the warrior lifestyle without directly participating in it, were clearly vexing questions for the audiences and patrons of the tales. The following chapters will show the conflicted, dynamic ways in which the surviving stories attempt to address and answer these questions. It will be necessary, first of all, to delineate the specific models of masculinity used within these genres by medieval Welsh writers.

The Warrior Model

The warrior is probably the most recognisable and easily-categorised model of medieval heterosexual masculinity, and crucial to the literature, as he reflects a significant segment of the genuine power-brokers of the middle ages. To modern eyes, the image of the armoured knight remains perhaps the most iconic representation of medieval humanity, easily recognisable, found in paintings and tapestries, effigies in cold church alcoves, in films and video games, on the television

⁸² Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 43.

screen and the covers of novels. Warrior men in Welsh Arthurian texts fall into two primary categories, which effectively correspond to the generic categories described above. Gender, in both their own masculine traits and their relationship with the women around them, is one of the most significant markers of these categories.

Certain things are expected of warrior men in both models. Courageous in battle, merciless in victory, undaunted in defeat – here too a generic distinction appears to apply, as death is glorious in a heroic milieu but seldom occurs in a romantic one. He is also faultlessly loyal and usually chaste, though always with the capacity for sexual virility. While it was important to possess the ability to resist sexual temptation, McNamara notes that

male sexuality is constructed on the phallus as a symbol of power, a myth that grossly overburdens physical reality. In contrast to the phallic imagery of masculinism, the penis is rarely erect. Thus, the necessary myth of constant, uncontrollable potency has to be ritually strengthened in male gatherings.⁸³

While the clergy, as I shall demonstrate below, appropriated the language of warfare and martial achievement to position their celibate selves as soldiers in a spiritual war, secular men were also expected to exhibit control over their own bodies and desires. 'Ancient man', as Cooper and Leyser have found, responding to Gibbon and Foucault, 'saw his identity as a man to avoid being ruled by the passions.'⁸⁴ Murray suggests that the 'myth of uncontrollable male lust' developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a response to the masculinity crisis proposed by McNamara – not, this is to say, that the requirements of masculine self-control altered to any great degree, but that the exaggeration of male eroticism raised the stakes and posited a greater challenge for medieval man to overcome.⁸⁵ For the high-status men of the ruling class, the ability to rule one's own passions justified and reflected an authority to rule over others, including, or perhaps especially, the allegedly hysterical, unstable sexuality of women.

83 McNamara, Jo Ann. 'The Herrenfrage: the restructuring of the gender system, 1050-1150' *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994) 3-30, p. 10.

84 Cooper and Leyser, 'Gender of grace,' p. 538.

85 Murray, Jacqueline. 'Masculinizing religious life: sexual prowess, the battle for chastity and monastic identity.' *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff: UWP 2004) 24-42, p. 25.

But not all men, or even all warrior men, are created equal, and the generic discourses of heroism and chivalry provide literature with two distinct models of masculine aggression.

Heroic models

The native Welsh model of masculinity is especially collective, based on a body of poetry which privileges martial brotherhood and excludes women from its discourse entirely. This is not only in contrast with the courtly literature from which the romance was born, but with a number of other literatures, including the sagas and epics often called 'heroic'. The existing tradition is not one of singular heroes like Beowulf or Odysseus, doing extraordinary things because of their superiority over other men, but of the victories of groups of closely-bonded companions whose exploits are possible because of the intensity of their loyalty and the strength of their homosocial bonds. Kenneth Jackson summed up the ideal of heroic masculine behaviour thusly: 'the accepted morality is courage and fierceness in war, generosity and liberality in peace, a longing for fame, a horror of disgrace, and a welcome for death provided it leads to immortal glory.'⁸⁶ This is not to say that this view goes unchallenged, as a number of texts question or subvert the so-called heroic ideal in various ways, but the centrality of masculine action and masculine homosocial connection remain constant even in those texts which allow agency and impact to their female characters. Powerful men, even Arthur himself, act within a system that privileges companionship and collaboration, and important decisions – marriages, wars, and punishments – are often made communally. Like the *chansons de geste* of medieval France, most native Welsh literature promotes a pervasive ideal of warrior brotherhood, unmediated by feminine influence. Because this 'heroic' model defines masculinity through a man's relationships with other men, rather than relationships with women, it excludes the female from the discourse entirely. The dichotomies are those of father and son, lord and vassal, uncle and nephew, or companions in arms. Warriors in this model act out their emotions: they may cry, embrace each other, and even faint without being emasculated, for the epic genre

86 Jackson, Kenneth Hurlstone. *Y Gododdin: The Earliest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 38.

depends on external action to reflect the internal.⁸⁷ Heroic masculinity allows for *acting* on a wide emotional spectrum; it has very little room for spoken philosophising.

While women may exist, or even participate, in the narrative, they function only as objects of exchange between men, to strengthen or subvert the ties of an extremely masculine ethical system. Rowland's hypothesis that the exiled Heledd is the sole survivor of a failed alliance stems from this notion, and from the frequency in heroic literature of such conflicting loyalties; the role of peaceweaver between warring factions is one of the few places in heroic literature where women are central.⁸⁸ In *Culhwch*, the marriage of Olwen the giant's daughter to a cousin of Arthur serves to bring a frontier land under his control. Sarah Kay argues that some women are used to highlight the shortcomings of a strongly male order but may be ignored, restrained, or treated with violence, as a female presence can disrupt the masculine homosocial community.⁸⁹ The bulk of early Welsh poetry, however, simply excludes them. When such characters do appear, they act as props and set-dressing to support the texts' hypermasculine ideology: one where the 'battlefield is a space in which men are united' and so attempts to construct a hegemonic masculinity which accepts no alterity.⁹⁰ In native Welsh poetry the similarities between warrior figures is evinced by the formulae which fill the lines of panegyric poetry; the repetition of accepted phrases and comparisons means that the warriors of the *Gododdin*, Urien's war-band or the native princes can be difficult to tell apart from one another.

Chivalric models

The heroic model of masculinity occupies epic and saga; romance is populated by men in a courtly or chivalric model. Occupying a vast and varied collection of heterogeneous texts, chivalry too is multivalent, but romance employs a certain thematic consistency in matters of love, loyalty, and

87 Ailes, M.J. 'The medieval male couple and the language of homosociality,' *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, D.M. Hadley, ed. (New York 1999) 214-237, pp. 217-18.

88 Rowland, *EWSP*, p. 142.

89 Kay, Sarah. *Raoul de Cambrai* (Oxford 1992) p. lxxi.

90 Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 26.

honour. While the rise of courtly literature is often considered a development growing out of epic, Penny Schine Gold has suggested that the position of women serves as a major generic marker between heroic literature and romance, rather than a diachronic one, and that both forms at least overlapped, if not in fact produced coterminously.⁹¹

In its original sense, the word 'chivalric' simply means 'having to do with horsemen', derived from the French word *chevalier*, though it came to represent a category of fiction that had a long-lasting and profound effect on the Western literary world.⁹² By the late middle ages it was a code of behaviour, an ethos that had permeated much of Europe and been created almost entirely by the genre of chivalric literature. The discourse of chivalry was used by the Church, especially when promoting the Crusades; by universities who adopted its terminology for scholarly purposes; by poets of all genres. It was internationally influential and profoundly idealistic, and it became the single most defining characteristic of the Arthurian literary court.

It was over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the term 'knight' itself, in its various languages, took on an ethical connotation beyond merely that of a mounted warrior. The definition contained social and economic aspects as well, since a knight was, by necessity, wealthy enough to afford his own horse and armour — a considerable expense for a medieval landowner, and therefore one that automatically precluded anyone below the highest echelons of society from entry. Chivalric literature is, therefore, the literature of the nobility; its gaze rests entirely on the nobility, and the extended kinship structure of kings and queens. Even the characters who have been afflicted by poverty — Enid's family in *Gereint*, and Peredur's after the loss of his father's earldom — are of noble blood, a situation probably not unfamiliar to much of the noble population of medieval Europe. The ethical code itself varied somewhat by region, but generally consisted of a combination of obligation toward a knight's lord and companions in arms, toward the Church and other Christians, and toward women — in Welsh, this is dealt with explicitly in *Peredur*, whose mother gives him

91 Gold, Penny Schine. *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago 1985) p. 73.

92 Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia 2003) p. 20

advice which is later contradicted by his uncles. These different forms can each be privileged within their own stories, such as in the purely religious chivalry of the Grail stories, or be examined as a source of conflict: for instance the tension between warrior and love duties in *Gereint* and *Owein*, which each resolve the dilemma differently.

Unlike heroic tales, in which a female presence is disruptive to the prescribed social order and military brotherhood, romance makes the woman central to both constructing and mediating the knights' masculine identities. Nowhere is this more obvious than the requirement that a knight must fight on behalf of a lady. Romance is predicated on participation in heterosexual conformity – grounded, as Gaunt argues, 'in compulsory heterosexuality and homosocial desire'.⁹³ Through the lady who served as the object of his affections, his real affection for his fellow men could be mediated – made less threatening, perhaps, in the eyes of a Church struggling to maintain control of large groups of armed men.⁹⁴

The literary construction of chivalric love service was rather an elaborate game which could be played only by certain participants and under strict and certain rules. This construction became increasingly important in Europe as the Middle Ages waned, and participation in a heterosexual love affair, even though it may not contain an actual sexual component, because compulsory behaviour for a knight. By the fifteenth century, the idea of love service as necessary for knightly nobility was firmly entrenched in literature: for example, Antoine de la Sale's *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* (c. 1456) shows a lady criticising the young hero for not taking part:

'Oh, feeble gentleman! And you say that you love none? By this I know that you will never be worth anything! And, feeble heart that you are! from where come the great valour, great enterprises and knightly deeds of Lancelot [...] if not to obtain the service of love and keep them in the graces of their most desired ladies.'⁹⁵

Likewise, Malory's Isolde tells Sir Dinadin, 'it is a great shame to you, for you may not be called a good knight except if you make a quarrel for a lady.'⁹⁶ These later writers are looking back

93 Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 75.

94 *ibid.*

95 de la Sale, Antoine. *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*, ed. Pierre Champion and Fernand Desonay (Paris 1926), pp. 20-21.

96 Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte d'Arthur* Bk X ln.55. Eugene Vinaver, ed. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947) p. 689.

on a construction of gendered chivalry created in the previous several centuries by poets, and a similar example occurs in the Welsh *Gereint*, as well as Chrétien's *Erec*, when the hero arrives at the tournament to fight the Knight of the Sparrowhawk but is prevented from taking part unless he fights for the honour of a lady.

It is important to note that including women in the value system is not the same thing as giving them agency, and the women of romance, although they can be delightfully subversive at times, are also just as likely to support the status quo as those mothers and lovers of the heroes of epic who send them off to glorious battle. Furthermore, the frequent position of mediator of men's virtue can have extremely negative consequences for women. Violence against women by men, which certainly affects those same women the most, might be meant as a strike against their male kin more than a personal assault; those committing the violence may not even really consider the impact of their actions on its objects. The literary use of violence against women as impetus for a male hero's action has its roots in ancient cultures – the Old Testament lists 'your neighbour's wife' along with servants, oxen, and donkeys in a list of possessions to be protected from covetous hands – but also reflects real contemporary attitudes. Leslie McNellis, in her study of the results of real rape cases put to the English courts between 1200 and 1250, observed that 'society had a difficulty viewing rape as a personal crime against a woman as opposed to a crime against her family' even when sexual violence was found to have actually occurred, and her analysis of the verdicts in the cases finds that the autonomy women had during the period to appeal their own cases caused so much anxiety on the part of a patriarchal legal society that rules were instituted to transfer the power of appeal to a male relative.⁹⁷

Men's relationships, or lack thereof, with women form a significant part of their own masculine identities, whether acknowledged or not. A medieval Welshman's identity — and a Welshwoman's, too — is defined through carefully-delineated familial ties, and his behaviour and

⁹⁷ McNellis, Leslie. *Let Her Be Taken: Sexual Violence in Medieval England*. (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Central Florida, 2003), p. iii.

obligations toward those in his social and kin group mark the sort of man he is. The tension in the *rhamantau* or in the Four Branches can be seen to stem from the conflicts that arise between these allegiances, for instance in *Owein* and *Gereint* in the perceived conflict between heterosexual marriage and homosocial or feudal ties.⁹⁸ (The equally conflicted loyalties of female characters will be discussed below.)

These tensions can also be felt between the two primary models of warrior masculinity found in medieval Welsh texts. With the twelfth-century fashion, throughout Europe, for French courtly romance – which carried on in an evolving form for a good three centuries, allowing for multiple versions and transmissions – Welsh tales, like English ones, show the influence of chivalry. The poetry of *Beirdd y Tywysogion* and, later, *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* provide ample evidence that the heroic model remained important in Wales, especially in panegyric poetry. Guto'r Glyn in the fifteenth century uses much of the same imagery and formula as the bards of three centuries earlier.⁹⁹ The Welsh tale *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* engages explicitly with these tensions, as does *Gereint*, suggesting that the writers of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Wales were conscious of the ideological conflicts present in their own literary culture.

While scholarly opinions differ on just how much either of these literary ideals actually reflected real life, it is as literary constructions that both concern us most. There is ample evidence that the tenets of literary chivalry were taken very seriously indeed throughout Europe.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the Welsh heroic age of the Old North may well never have looked anything like the image the medieval poets paint of it, but its ideals were integral to Wales's image of itself, not only in the early middle ages but also at the end of them.¹⁰¹

It is difficult to say to what extent the discourse of *fin amors* really integrated into Welsh society in the early middle ages, whether it was a continental import as C.S. Lewis claims or the

98 Gilbert, Jane, 'Arthurian ethics', *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, 154-70, p 154

99 Ann Parry Owen et al, *Guto'r Glyn.net* (Aberystwyth 2013) <<http://gutorglyn.net>> [accessed 27 October 2015].

100Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 27; Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 219-37.

101Haycock, Marged. 'Early Welsh poets look north.' *Beyond the Gododdin: Dark Age Scotland in Medieval Wales*, ed. Alex Woolf (St Andrews 2013) 9-40, p. 16.

natural development of a native tradition as suggested by Peter Dronke.¹⁰² There is certainly evidence of its influence in the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym and the later *Cywyddwyr*; but its treatment the Welsh Arthurian writers is consistently conflicted. However popular the French romances became in Wales, the chivalric hero never completely supplanted the heroic one, and the chapter on the *rhamantau* will show not only a metatextual disconnect but an explicit engagement with discourses of heroism and chivalry by the characters themselves.

The Clerical Model

Not all rich, educated medieval men were knights or soldiers. The Church provided an alternative career path for those without the means to equip themselves or the desire for bloodshed, and monasteries were often the designated destination for younger sons who could not be sure of an inheritance. William the Conqueror's son Henry, who became Henry I of England, had been intended for a clerical career, for instance, until the early deaths of his brothers put him on the throne, and he had both been educated in the liberal arts tradition. In Wales, where inheritance laws dictated even younger sons would be entitled to a share of their father's estate, it would have been less necessary for them to take holy orders, but could of course still be prompted to do so by familial pressures, economic circumstances, or genuine vocation. The Cistercians were the primary monastic order of medieval Wales, with fifteen houses established between the 1130s and the turn of the thirteenth century.¹⁰³ The later houses in particular—Strata Florida (Ystrad-Fflur), for instance, and Strata Marcella (Ystrad Marchell) – were integral to the preservation of the Welsh literary tradition.

Monks were transmitters of the knightly construction of masculinity, but not participants in it. As a good many had come from aristocratic families, where they had absorbed the value system

¹⁰²Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, and Dronke, *Medieval Love Lyric*, passim. I find Dronke's argument, which offers examples of a 'courtly love' style as far back as Egypt and Byzantium, the more convincing in general, but also find that the Arthurian texts appearing here are influenced specifically by the spread of the French tradition.

¹⁰³ Burton, Janet. 'The Cistercians in Wales.' *Monastic Wales*, <http://www.monasticwales.org/showarticle.php?func=showarticle&articleID=2> [Retrieved 29 October 2015].

of the military class, this provoked a tension between the concept of masculinity with which they had been presented their entire lives, and the one they were now required to live by. This was particularly true of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the wider Church attempted to reconcile the lives of cloistered monks and secular priests, and prior hybrid models, such as the warrior-archbishop Turpin, were no longer desirable.¹⁰⁴

Some scholars have suggested that medieval monks should be considered a 'third gender', a suggestion that places primacy on heterosexual activity as a measure of masculinity. Jacqueline Murray, for example, suggests that 'chastity required biological sex and social gender to be transformed in both men and women', and that therefore this monastic 'third gender' could be used to bridge the gap between medieval men and women, who 'could truly imagine themselves as the one flesh of creation, in relationship with each other, without...oppositionalities'.¹⁰⁵ This fits with modern discourses about the spectrum of gender performance, but is not borne out in the discussions by contemporary medieval writers. Rather I would argue, with Karras and others, that these men did not abandon their masculinity even in the instances in which they actually did give up involvement in the heterosexual performance of male sexual life — which many, especially in the earlier middle ages, certainly did not.¹⁰⁶ Even amongst the men of the church, there was debate over just how much contact with the opposite sex was advisable. Even as much of the medieval approach to gender considered men and women in binary opposition and defined against each other, these monastic men did not consider themselves to not be men, but rather to be participating in a more civilised, elevated form of masculine discourse. It is important to remember, both here and elsewhere, that an individual who deviates from the ideal standards of his or her gender must not

104 McNamara, 'The *Herrenfrage*,' p. 3ff. Also Murray, Jacqueline. 'Masculinizing religious life: sexual prowess, the battle for chastity and monastic identity.' *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff 2004) 24-42, pp. 24-26.

105 Murray, J. 'One flesh, two sexes, three genders?' *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*. ed. Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifschitz (Philadelphia, 2008) 34-51, p. 51.

106 Karras, R. 'Thomas Aquinas' chastity belt: clerical masculinity in medieval Europe.' *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*. 52-67. p 53. It is also important here to note the differences between monastic and secular clergy in the early middle ages, as the latter were allowed to marry, father children, and live in the world whilst tending to their parish.

always be said to be abandoning it — like every other aspect of human personality, gender adherence occurs on a spectrum. Women who show leadership, sexual independence, or military prowess have certainly existed, and while certain historical definitions degendered them or referred to them as 'manly', we must be cautious of allowing the fiction that these women are actually behaving like men, rather than simply being examples of a particular type of strong woman. It is similarly dangerous, then, to imply that men who have opted out of the violent, heterosexual warrior model of masculinity are any less men than those who ride about the countryside knocking people off horses and slaughtering their enemies. The Church promoted, instead, a model of masculinity in which strength of will was prized over strength of arms, chastity was seen as a rejection of worldly vices, and if there was a battle to be won, it was the battle for the souls of Christians against the temptations of the Devil. Rooted in the epistles of St Paul, that marriage was preferable to living in sin but virginity was the state to be most desired, adherents to this monastic model emphasised their ability to resist the desires of the flesh, rather than their capacity for it, as the marker of their manhood.

Karras has argued that chastity could be seen as a medieval sexual orientation in its own right, with as much validity and importance as hetero- or homosexuality might today.¹⁰⁷ While promulgated for all by the medieval church as a way to attain closeness with God and eventual eternal salvation, chastity as a lifestyle was an important marker of identity which been described by writers of the time as an inner compulsion in its own right, to which young people were sometimes drawn even before they reached puberty. Certainly recent studies in modern sexual identities have seen an increase in the understanding of asexual identities, in which people are genuinely not drawn to the idea of sexual activity with anyone at all — a condition previously considered either virtue or prudishness, depending on the context.¹⁰⁸ However, medieval chastity is not considered a natural orientation by medieval writers in the least. Rather, the clerical writers

107 Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas' chastity belt', 54.

108 Carrigan, Mark. 'There's more to life than sex? Difference and commonality within the asexual community'. *Sexualities* 14 (2011) 462-478, p. 462.

adopt the language of warfare to frame their own required behaviour as a battle of will, marked by the necessity of a struggle against sexual temptation. The *vita* of Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, explains how the saint's father was a 'flower of knighthood' who gave up the military life to join the church, whereupon he 'donned armour against the flesh, soldiered against himself...both conqueror and conquered in one and the same conflict'.¹⁰⁹ The notion of the male body itself as a battleground figures prominently in medieval clerical writing, as a celibate class of monks who had grown up with and internalised ideas of masculinity which depended on martial prowess positioned themselves as warriors of a higher and different kind.

John Cassian described an ascending scale of chastity including six levels: the first involved not succumbing voluntarily to 'assaults of the flesh', after which point the mind and body were gradually wrested into control; having achieved the final stage a man would be impervious to temptation even while asleep and be immune from the effects of nocturnal emissions.¹¹⁰ St Augustine explains that the problem faced by men is not necessarily the inability to repress desire, but the inability to control the body's response to it even when desire is warranted and wanted. He '[introduced] impotence into the philosophical discourse of excess and self-control'¹¹¹ by reminding men that

Sometimes the urge arises unwanted; sometimes, on the other hand, it forsakes the eager lover, and desire grows cold in the body even while burning in the mind. Thus strangely, then, does lust refuse to serve not only the desire to beget, but even the lust for lewd enjoyment. Although it is for the most part wholly opposed to the mind's control, it is not seldom divided against itself: it arouses the mind, but does not follow through what it has begun and arouse the body also.¹¹²

Even a religious ascetic was familiar with the potential for humiliation brought on by lack of a man's control over the urges of the body; that the presence of women could stir such passions as could sometimes not be concluded was another example of male helplessness to be challenged, countered, and defeated.

109 Garton, Charles, ed. and trans. *The Metrical Life of Saint Hugh of Lincoln* (Lincoln 1986) p. 15.

110 Elliot, D. 'Pollution, illusion, and masculine disarray: nocturnal emissions and the sexuality of the clergy'.

Constructing Medieval Sexuality, Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, James Schultz (eds) (Minneapolis 1997), p. 3.

111 Cooper and Leyser. 'Gender of grace', p. 541.

112 Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*, XIV.16, R.W. Dyson, ed. and trans. (Cambridge 1998) p. 615.

While the ability to resist sexual desire was considered a manly trait and one of the signifiers of masculinity in both warrior and clerical models, for men, the ability to succeed in this struggle was entirely dependant on the help of God. This idea has a long history; we find its roots in the early Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries. For instance, St Anthony fights off the temptations of demons manfully (*viriliter*) – and the struggle is central to the idea of chastity itself. A quotation attributed to Abbot Cyrus of Alexandria reports him as saying, 'If you do not have thoughts of fornication, you have no hope; for if you do not have the thoughts, you have the deeds.'¹¹³ Without the struggle, the virtue itself was lessened—and in this way, the monastic model of manhood includes a component of fighting just as much as the warrior one. Gerald of Wales criticises men who wait until they are too old to feel sexual desire before taking orders, 'for no crown is given unless the struggle of a fierce battle has taken place. It is highly praiseworthy if they restrained themselves in the heat of passion and youth.'¹¹⁴ Therefore, it was not adherence to celibacy in and of itself that marked out clerical masculinity, but the struggle itself, and the strength of will to resist and overcome temptation and deny the sexual self.

Chastity, along with the self-control necessary to achieve it both sleeping and awake, was not the only aspect of clerical masculinity, though it was certainly an important one. Within a setting where women were separate or entirely absent, the homosocial aspects of masculinity were even more prominent than in the warrior model, where competition and display between men could be mediated through a female love interest. Much as the two competing models of warrior masculinity described above come into conflict with each other, so too does the monastic, clerical model contest them both. Rooted in devotion to a higher power than love, the *clergie* assert their supremacy over warrior man's earthly concerns. This is at its most explicit, of course, in hagiographical texts, where the superiority of saint over earthly kings is demonstrated again and again. As I will show, the

¹¹³ Pelagius, *Verba Seniorum* 5:5. *Patrologiae cursus completus*, ed. J.P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris 1844-1865) vol. 73, p. 875.

¹¹⁴ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, ed. John Sherren Brewer, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* vol. 2 (London 1862) p. 211.

clerical writers of medieval Wales also engage in a rivalry with the poets, as both orders considered themselves guardians of the scholarly tradition. The ultimate mediator within the monastery was God, and the learned man used his intellect and piety to dominate other men and show himself to be of the highest order of medieval man.

Welsh Arthurian literature, unlike many examples from other traditions, is told from an anonymous or flexible external viewpoint. Therefore, the clerical-author-as-narrator which makes irony such a feature of French romance does not appear, and the actual presence of this model in the texts discussed here is minimal. Their influence can still be felt, however, in the construction of character and ethics, and it is especially clear in Welsh that many of the clerical writers, while prohibited from engaging in the warrior *milieu*, nevertheless ascribe to its value system.

The Bardic Model

While the warrior and clerical models of masculinity can be found with regularity all over Europe, this third construction appears more prevalent in Celtic societies. In many ways the poet appears to occupy a liminal space between male and female, and to have the unique ability to transgress the boundaries of gender without consequence — even, it seems, to be expected to do so. The poet can make use of the usually feminine power of speech to great effect; the work of the bards is, at times, as potent as a magic spell and can have the same outcomes. The most striking example in Welsh literature is the character of Gwydion in the Fourth Branch, who is the 'goreu kyuarwyd yn y byt' ('the best storyteller in the world') and uses the power of his gifted tongue to further his own personal ends, even to the detriment of the kingdom and his kin-group.¹¹⁵ It is his position as a poet and his ability to spin a good tale that enables him to convince Pryderi to give him the pigs of Annwn, but he takes this dissolution of gender boundaries even further by usurping the female power of childbirth, first by only half-symbolically giving birth to a child, and then by attempting, together with his uncle Math, to create a woman out of flowers. Math, a childless patriarch whose

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *Math*, p. 3.

magical powers depend on his striking people with his staff, is clearly the father-figure in this arrangement, while Gwydion acts as mother.¹¹⁶ While there is obviously a difference between literary figures and living poets, the attribution of works to legendary bards like Taliesin and the abundance of references to mythological or legendary figures and events throughout their poetry remind us that the *Gogynfeirdd* and the *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* were engaged in a considerable amount of cultural myth-making, and used their liminal position - between male and female, between earthly and Otherworldly, between the 'real' and the fictionalised - to lend authority to their creations.

There is a long tradition in which the poet portrays himself as the spouse or lover of his patron, well-attested in both Irish and Welsh. James Carney first drew attention to this trend with regard to the Irish *fili* in medieval Irish poetry, and accepted it as a pre-Christian remnant of Celtic society.¹¹⁷ The poet is represented as the patron's '*fer éinleabtha*' ('bed companion') and draws on a vocabulary of expressive, often romantic love when describing him, a state of affairs which lasts into the sixteenth century in Ireland. Carney suggests this begins early in the tradition, and suggests the early Irish poem known as 'The Lament of the Old Hag of Beare' makes use of this 'well-established conceit, the completely feminine role of "king-lover"'.¹¹⁸

In Wales, Proinsias MacCana has demonstrated a similar trend appearing in the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym and Guto'r Glyn, as well as possible antecedents in ancient India.¹¹⁹ Whenever parallels occur between Celtic and Indian poetic tradition, the general view is to seize on it as a remnant of an ancient Indo-European heritage. This insistence distracts somewhat from the significance of this literary relationship within the cultural fabric of medieval Wales. More recently, Peter Busse repurposed Mac Cana's title and suggested some potential origins of the trope as well as

116 In addition to the symbolic second birth of Lleu, Gwydion has also birthed a child by his brother Gilfaethwy during the second year of their punishment. See Hughes, *Math*, pp. 8 and 66.

117 Carney, James. 'The Féuch fein controversy', *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin 1955) p. 250.

118 Carney, James. *Medieval Irish Lyrics* (Portlaoise 1985) pp. xxiv-xxv. Also see Katharine Simms, 'The Poet as chieftain's widow: bardic elegies.' Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim R. McCone, eds, *Sages, saints and storytellers: Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth: An Sagart 1989) 400-411.

119 Mac Cana, Proinsias. 'The poet as spouse of his patron'. *Ériu* 39 (1988): 79-85.

exploring some similarities within poetry from other cultures.¹²⁰

The so-called 'historical' Taliesin poems include one in which the praise of Urien's battle prowess takes a back seat to the poet's worry over his safety. Unlike most of the praise poems describing Urien's battles, this time the poet has not accompanied him. Instead, he waits at home with the king's worried and grieving wife; in their fear for their lord's safe return he refers to her prematurely as a widow. Here are Urien's poet and Urien's wife, placed next to each other literally as well as metaphorically – both are located in the domestic sphere, far away from the more masculine arena of the battlefield, and the narrator-poet seems to be projecting some of his own fears onto her. A declaration of devotion can also be found in Taliesin's *dadolwch*, or apology poem, in which the narrator regrets having offended Urien, and laments in a tone reminiscent of a lover:

Nyt oed well a gerwn / kyn ys gwybydwn
weithon y gwelaf / y meint a gaffaf.
Namyn y duw uchaf / nys dioferaf...¹²¹

Dafydd ap Gwilym, in a *cywydd* to his patron Ifor Hael, explains that he cannot go north to Gwynedd and Anglesey because of his love for someone in the south:

Dywed, o'm gwlad ni'm gadwyd,
Duw a'i gŵyr, dieuog wyd,
Fy mod es talm, salm Selyf,
Yn caru dyn uwch Caerdyf.¹²²

Conveniently, Dafydd ap Gwilym has a number of love poems to women surviving for comparison, by which we can see that he uses essentially the same vocabulary. Gwyn Thomas draws attention to this stanza, pointing out that it appears, at first, that the poet is restrained by love of a woman. The next part, however, reveals this is not the case:

Nid salw na cham fy namwain
nid serch ar finrhasgl ferch fain.

120Busse, Peter. 'The poet as spouse of his patron: homoerotic love in medieval Welsh and Irish poetry?' *Studi Celtici* 2 (2003) 175-192.

121Williams, Ifor. *The Poems of Taliesin*, English version ed. J. E. Caerwyn Williams (Dublin 1968), p. 11. 'There would be no-one that I would love more; / ignorant though I was, I see now the extent of what I have: / except to the highest God / I'll not give him up.' Trans. Meirion Pennar, *Taliesin Poems* (Burnham-on-Sea 1988), p. 100

122Dafydd ap Gwilym. 'Basaleg.' trans. Huw Meirion Edwards, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 2015. <<http://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.htm>> [accessed 19 June 2015]. 'Say that I have not been free to leave my country / God knows you are in no way responsible / that I have been for some time--Solomon's psalm-- / courting one who lives near Cardiff.'

Mawr serch Ifor a'm goryw,
 Mwy no serch ar ordderch yw.
 Serch Ifor a glodforais,
 Mwy no serch anwydful Sais,
 Ac nid af, beffeithiaf bôr,
 os eirch ef, o serch Ifor,
 nac undydd i drefydd drwg,
 nac unnos o Forgannwg.¹²³

The lines explain how this love is more perfect and more compelling than any other, and that the poet cannot bring himself to spend a single night away from Ifor's presence. In still another poem to Ifor, in which Dafydd has finally been persuaded to leave his side after all, he begins the lines of leave-taking with the words, 'ufudd serchogion ofeg': 'faithful lovers' intent'.¹²⁴ Both of these are praise poems which contain a number of conventional images: Ifor is generous beyond counting, golden, a descendant of lords and a lord himself.

Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr refers to Rhirid Flaidd as 'a wolf who loves me', and the poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd* is full of examples of amatory language by poets to their patrons.¹²⁵ In the fifteenth century, Guto'r Glyn continues this tradition, including a poem to his own patron, Hywel ab Ieuan Fychan, which both references Dafydd ap Gwilym's patron Ifor Hael, and begins with the words, 'Y mae gŵr ym i'w garu' – 'I have a man to love.' Guto's use of amatory language in his praise poetry is especially prevalent, and he references a marriage-like relationship with Hywel.

Mwythau ni âd ym weithian
 Fyned o'th gwert, fendith gwan,
 Rhodd priodas urddas oedd,
 Rhwymyn Duw rhôm ein deuoedd.
 Anhebig heb genfigen
 I briodas gwas â gwen.
 Nis gwnaeth, digaeth ostegion,
 Brawd Sais y briodas hon.
 Duw Tad wedi deuoed hydd
 A'th briodes â'th brydydd.

¹²³*ibid.* 'My fortune is not sordid or perverse, it is not love for some slender, smooth-lipped maid, it's true love for Ifor that's overwhelmed me, greater than the love for any mistress. I have praised Ifor's love, which is unlike that of a stupid Englishman, and I'll not go (most perfect lord) if he so requests, for the love of Ifor, a single day to wicked towns, nor a single night from Glamorgan.'

¹²⁴Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Ymadael Ifor Hael.' Trans. Dafydd Johnston, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 2015. <<http://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.htm>> [accessed 19 June 2015].

¹²⁵See Busse, *Poet as Spouse*, and notes to poem below on gutorglyn.net. I also presented more comprehensively on this subject in a paper, 'The Prince and his poet: Ritual romance in medieval Welsh praise poetry' at the International Congress of Celtic Studies, Glasgow, July 2015. Not all instances of 'caru' or similar words reflect even a pseudo-amatory relationship, but this is an area in which more study is required.

Rhoi'n dystion, rhan dwy osteg,
Ydd wyf dri chywydd ar ddeg.
Cynhysgaeth o'm cynhwysgerdd
a gei tra fythwyf ar gerdd.¹²⁶

Guto was writing at the time of the Wars of the Roses, long after the loss of Wales's sovereignty to England, during a period of intense anxiety for Welsh poets and *uchelwyr*. He and his contemporaries were well-versed in the poetic tradition and can be safely assumed to be working from an established template. The poem to Hywel is explicit in its representation of the relationship between poet and patron as a sacred marriage, one outside the Church but still bound up by its belief system and dissolvable only by Christ himself. The lines, '*anhebig heb genfigen / i briodas gwas â gwen*' go so far as to place this marriage above the traditional heterosexual one, at least in terms of understanding between the two partners. Is this pairing 'without jealousy' because of the perfect communion of the two minds involved, or because the lack of a sexual component makes it more pure than a marriage which, by its very nature, exists to formalise an act on which medieval Christian teaching is heavily ambivalent? Or, in a medieval world where the sexes are so often segregated, does it make use of the common wisdom, invoked by Chaucer's Wife of Bath, that the 'Venerien in feelinge' lies at a different pole than the 'sturdy hardinesse' of Mars?¹²⁷ If men and women are opposite in temperament, are they then incapable of forming the same deep intellectual and emotional understanding as members of the same sex? In another poem, Guto describes himself as a mourning Epyllt lamenting the death of Trystan, but the poem is an elegy to an abbot; Carney and Mac Cana both observe that in both Irish and Welsh work the poet is always placed in the feminine position.

Busse notes – calling it a 'scandal' – the unspoken scholarly agreement, when dealing with erotic poetry in many different languages and cultural milieu, to disavow their homoerotic qualities

126 Guto'r Glyn, 'Moliant i Hywel ab Ieuan Fychan o Foeliwrch.' Trans. Eurig Salisbury, *Gutorglyn.net*. Aberystwyth 2013. <<http://gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/poem/?poem-selection=091&first-line=001>> [accessed 20 June 2015] 'A marriage was made between the both of us / it was dignity, the One God's bond / Dissimilar to a young man and woman's marriage / without jealousy / this marriage wasn't made by an English brother / free banns; / God the Father after two trysts / married you with your poet. / I give thirteen cywyddau as witnesses / a part of two banns / you'll receive a marriage portion from my welcomed poem / as long as a poem is mine.'

127 Chaucer, Geoffrey. 'The Wife of Bath's prologue,' ll. 599-613. *The Wife of Bath*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Boston 1996) p. 65.

by any means necessary.¹²⁸ The vocabulary of love used here by Guto, and so frequently by panegyric poets, likely does not indicate the presence of an actual homosexual love affair. It is also noteworthy that correspondence between medieval men, especially churchmen, can contain language that in a later context would be the most fervent of love letters but is in fact expressing a very deep friendship. This is the notion of *amicitia* – a deep and involving Christian friendship. It is, of course, entirely possible that some relationships between poet and patron may have been sexual. It is impossible to make generalising claims regarding the frequency of such relationships, but an actual sexual component, if it occurred, must be considered as entirely separate from the literary construction of this marriage-like relationship. We are limited in our ability to reconstruct the personal lives of strangers – instead, especially in praise poetry, we must consider their private thoughts and feelings as separate from the publicly expressed convention. David Clark, in the introduction to *Between Medieval Men*, argue that 'it is clearly not useful to assume intimacy only between gay men...or that male friendship in the past must of necessity have contained no erotic component.'¹²⁹ Independent of the potential presence of any actual physical love affair, the literary representation of the poet as the spouse and lover of his literary patron remains a method of movement between gendered barriers for the medieval bard.

The bardic class also appears to have enjoyed a healthy rivalry with the clergy. The Taliesin-narrator of 'Preiddeu Annwn' expresses frustration with the ignorance of churchmen, saying they 'congregate like wolves', and Gildas's famous rant in *De Excidio Britanniae* refers to the praise of a British king's poets as 'mouths stuffed with lies and...foaming phlegm'.¹³⁰ Haycock suggests this demonstrates not an actual divide between the learned classes, but 'the kind of casual banter which besets men in uniform'.¹³¹ Gildas's fire and brimstone aside, it is likely that there was a good deal of collaboration and sharing of knowledge between the poets and the priests, not least of which is the

128Busse, 'Poet as spouse?' p. 191.

129Clark, David. *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford 2009) p. 4.

130Gildas. *De Excidio Britanniae* 34.6, in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, trans. and ed. by Michael Winterbottom (London 1978) p. 34.

131Haycock, Marged. 'Preiddeu Annwn and the figure of Taliesin.' *Studia Celtica* 18.19 (1983): 52-78, p. 57.

fact the churchmen are the ones who often committed the poets' work to parchment for future preservation. The presence of the Juvenius *englynion* and *Armes Prydein* both suggest a level of shared interconnection, as do the dialogues between Myrddin and Taliesin in both *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* and in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*. However, there appears to have been a perception in the middle ages of an historical conflict between the two classes.

This model, perhaps unsurprisingly, occurs in Welsh Arthurian texts only in poetry. While Taliesin accompanies Arthur on his quest to Annwn, and references to poetic interest in Arthur is found in texts which are not covered within this project, the bard is mostly external to the storytelling process. While it is clear that the actual bards held the responsibility for transmitting texts via oral performance, they do not appear as characters within *Culhwch ac Olwen* or any of the *rhamantau*. The association between poets and Arthur's court is emphasised instead in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and not in a particularly complimentary manner. Within the prose material they serve as narrators, but nameless ones, who either refrain from offering judgement on the narrative, or have had that judgement removed by literary redactors.

Medieval Feminine Models

While models of masculinity are divided according to function – that is, what the men in question actually *do* – the primary contemporary division for medieval women was rooted in biology and the capacity for childbearing. Thomas Charles-Edwards has identified several legal divisions, including a limited liminal period between the age when a girl was deemed ready for marriage and that when she might have her first child, generally the period between the ages of twelve and fourteen.¹³² But multiple models can exist simultaneously within these loose definitions: mothers may also be (and often are) stepmothers, wives may be widows, while nuns and mystics – the categories necessarily omitted from this project – occupy another place entirely. What is most striking about all these various constructions of womanhood is their dependence on the definitions

¹³²Charles-Edwards, Thomas. *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford 1993) p. 177.

of the woman's relationships to other members of her family, whether it be parents, husbands, children, or God. Less useful still, but ubiquitous in Celtic literary criticism, is the symbolic identity of a woman as sovereignty figure, an idea so enduring that it will be dealt with in more detail shortly.

To define models of literary femininity on the basis of a female character's relationship to the hero or other (usually male) characters is not especially appealing to modern sensibilities, but nevertheless reflects contemporary categorisations. It also means that the models by which female characters are constructed are not so clear-cut as the masculine ones, and are characterised by a considerable overlap between feminine functions. The legal status of people in medieval Wales was bound up in a communal identity of kinship, and this is especially true of women, who went from being someone's daughter to someone's wife to someone's mother, often all within the space of a few years. These are not the only relevant models, but they are important ones. Charles-Edwards has found that the legal life cycle of Celtic noblewomen was intrinsically linked to sexuality and childbearing, where that of the men is more concerned with entering public life and becoming the head of a household.¹³³ This is unsurprising, considered with a view of the medieval household as a double-sided entity, a partnership between the public and private spheres. In a society focused heavily around the concerns of dynastic succession, women's role was to ensure the continuation of the family line, and most of the limitations on female behaviour in the middle ages stems directly from the tension resulting from men's inability to perform, and therefore control, the reproductive function. As the men are the ones making most of the rules, and they defined womanhood in terms of being different from themselves, that is the model we are most commonly left with.

Childhood, for both sexes, lasted until puberty – social puberty, rather than physiological puberty, which Van Gennep notes 'are essentially different and only rarely converge'.¹³⁴ Before this point, as the physical gender difference had not yet manifested and both sexes were legally children

¹³³*ibid.*

¹³⁴Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage: A Classic Study of Cultural Celebrations*, Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, trans. (Chicago 1960) p. 65.

(constructed as a sexless and genderless pre-adult state) 'at [their] father's platter', those differences were not yet important.¹³⁵

At fourteen, both men and women become youth, a stage which may well last for the majority of their lives. A man would remain in this phase until the death of his father, at which point he would take over the running of the household, but for a women, youth lasted until menopause.¹³⁶ Having left the authority of her father for that of her husband and his family, her identity became bound up with theirs. Only in widowhood might she have a singular identity without reference to a male relative or guardian – this is demonstrated in the vast number of female characters haunting Welsh texts who have no names of their own. This does not all mean, of course, that married women, either in life or literature, could exert no control over their husbands and in-laws; history abounds with tales of formidable wives and mothers who did exactly that. It would hardly have been necessary for men to caution each other so anxiously against ceding their wives too much control if it had been an impossibility!

While legally their ties may have been to their husbands, there are also many examples, both in history and literature, of women being caught between the families of their birth and those of their marriage. In Ireland, the woman's birth family never entirely resigned all rights to her, rather, 'there is clear evidence that marriage did not sever the tie between a woman and her original family'¹³⁷: they were entitled to part of the compensatory payment if she were killed by a stranger, as well as retaining some interest in her estate and her children, and as her dowry was likely to contain a *galloglas* consisting of a number of her own warriors, conflict could be bloody.¹³⁸ There is limited information on Welsh women as leaders of their own war-bands as opposed to Ireland, where it seems to have been relatively common.¹³⁹ The only medieval example from Wales is

135Roberts, Sara Elin. 'Seeking the middle-aged woman in medieval Wales,' *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sue Niebrzydowski (Woodbridge 2011) 25-36, p. 30.

136Charles-Edwards, *Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 177.

137Thurneysen, R., Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knock and John Ryan, *Studies in early Irish law* (Dublin 1936), pp. 180-81.

138Kenny, Gillian. 'Anglo-Irish and Gaelic marriage laws and traditions in late medieval Ireland,' *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006) 27-42 p. 34.

139*ibid.*

Gwenllian ferch Gruffydd, leading her husband's army to defeat at Kidwelly in 1136. Queens and ladies of Ireland, England, and the continent, however, were all active in their husbands' campaigns to varying degrees, and it seems unlikely that Wales alone managed to spawn centuries of women who took no part in the battles consistently going on around them. It is more likely that those who took part did so under the names and auspices of husbands, sons, and brothers, and so unlike Gwenllian's famous resistance, received no credit in the chronicles. Certainly Welsh women are noted as having taken part in at least the instigation of battles and rebellions, even if they never took to the battlefield themselves.

Be that as it may, medieval Wales lacks the 'warrior woman' archetype of the Gaelic Scáthach or Aoife, or any of the shieldmaidens of the Norse tales; the trainer function is taken over instead by witches. Possibly this archetype comes to Ireland and Scotland through Norse influence, or a native British version died out early in Wales. Ammianus Marcellinus claims that 'a whole troop of foreigners would not be able to withstand a single Celt if he called his wife to his assistance', certainly suggesting that the early Celtic women had a reputation for ferocity.¹⁴⁰ However, Britain's most famous real-life warrior woman, Boudicca, faded from history for a number of centuries, and the woman of Welsh literature, while resourceful, clever and often dangerously magical, are not martial. Their weapons are tongues rather than swords, and those tongues can be sharp indeed. Only in *Peredur* is the hero trained by women. Indeed, the only women seen fighting physically in the texts included in this study are the Witches of Gloucester of *Peredur* and the Black Witch of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and not only are these messy, barbaric, unchivalrous fights, but inevitably end in female defeat. Powerful women in medieval Welsh texts control their fates, and those of others, by manipulating the circumstances surrounding them not with strength of arms, but with words and wit. Nowhere is this distinction between masculine and feminine power exemplified more clearly than in the Fourth Branch, in the difference between the magical powers of Aranrhod, who uses her words to fix a *tynged* on her son, and Math, who in an

¹⁴⁰Marcellinus, Ammianus. *Roman History*. Book 15:11 Trans. C.D. Yonge (London 1862) p. 80.

example of clearly phallic imagery, effects his enchantments by striking the object with his staff. Here I shall present three models of femininity which appear in the texts discussed here: the maidens who populate the texts as damsels in distress and potential love interests for the knights; mothers and stepmothers; and finally old women and witches, and when these two categories might conflate. These are not the only models for women which occur in Welsh texts, but as the present project does not include prophecy or hagiography, these are the most relevant examples. Finally, I will discuss the motif of the figure of Sovereignty and the possible reasons for its enduring popularity.

Maidens and Lovers

The most prevalent model of womanhood in Welsh Arthurian texts is the noblewoman caught in the near-eternal stage of youth. Of course maidenhood should, officially, refer to the stage of being an unmarried woman in her teens or twenties, and of necessity a virgin. This was recognised as a distinct stage by medieval writers: a fourteenth-century translation by John Trevisa of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' thirteenth-century text *De proprietatibus rerum* not only acknowledges it but references Isidore of Seville, not only suggesting a long tradition of categorising female adulthood but describing the danger even chaste women present to men:

A maiden child and a wench is called *puella*, as it were as clean and pure as the black of the eye, as sayeth Isidore. For among all that is loved in a wench chastity and cleanness is loved most. Men shall take heed of wenches for they be hot and moist of complexion: and tender, small, pliant and fair of disposition of body; shamefast, fearful, and merry, touching the affection; delicate in clothing. For as Seneca says, seemly clothing beseems them well that be chaste wenches. *Puella* is a name of soundness without wem, and also of honesty. So says Isidore....a maid has that name *virgo* of cleanness and incorruption as it were *virago*, for she knows not the very passion of women.¹⁴¹

However, the literature does not in fact adhere to these limitations. The maiden of Welsh Arthurian texts can be called *morwyn* regardless of her actual marital or sexual status; the term is not apparently used here as an indication of virginity, but as a marker of a particular category of noblewoman: Enid is referred to as *morwyn* through most of *Gereint* and the text of *Peredur* is

¹⁴¹M.C. Seymour et al (eds), *De puella in On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum. A Critical Text*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1975), vol 1 lib 6, cap 6.

populated with them, married and not – but when he first meets his intended, she is '*gwreic ar ben cruc*'.¹⁴² Sara Elin Roberts notes that while '*gwraig*' can be used in specific instances to indicate 'not a virgin' – the example of Goewin in the Fourth Branch, who informs Math of her new situation with '*gwreic wyf i*' – that it seems to be the most useful word appearing in Middle Welsh for 'an older woman...not a young girl, and usually not a virgin and quite possibly, but not necessarily, married'.¹⁴³

This maiden may have magical powers or a supernatural origin, but it is not a necessity: she may be Enid, the mortal daughter of an impoverished human lord, or Olwen, the child of the chief of giants. Like many of the cast of women in *Peredur*, she is likely to be in need of assistance from the hero, but sometimes, like the handmaiden Luned of *Iarlles y Ffynnon*, she may be the one to help him instead. Most often she is a lady with her own domain, which she rules in her own right – an uncommon occurrence for medieval Wales in fact, but a recurring one in literature.¹⁴⁴

She may be maid, or wife, or widow, but she is always childless: motherhood exists in a different category and it may be that the evidence of sexual activity – that is, children – rather than merely the potential for them, that forms a strict delineation between maidens and mothers. Thus in secular literature, unlike the hagiographies of female saints but, as the evidence suggests, was also the case in life, a widow can still be a maiden, provided she has no children by her late husband, such as the *iarlles* of *Owein* or the single example in *Gereint* of a wife whose marriage remains unconsummated by the time of her husband's untimely death. The Welsh Arthurian tales are populated by a large number of childless women, far more than seems realistically likely considering that the chief job and function of noblewomen in medieval society was securing the dynastic line through childbearing.

142Goetinck, Glenys. *Historia Peredur van Efracw: Golygwyd gyda Rhagymadrodd Nodiadau Testunol a Geirfa* (Cardiff 1976) p. 47.

143Roberts, Sara Elin. 'Seeking the middle-aged woman in medieval Wales,' *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sue Niebrzydowski (Woodbridge 2011) 25-36, p. 27.

144This is discussed in greater detail in Part III of this work, in the chapter on the *rhamantau*.

Mothers and Stepmothers

Mother figures, of great importance throughout medieval Welsh literature, are emphasised more in the native tales than the *rhamantau*, which focus primarily on husbands and wives. The hero's mother and stepmother in *Culhwch ac Olwen* are important, if ultimately ineffectual, characters, and the mothers of the Four Branches – Rhiannon, Branwen and Aranrhod – are both powerful and interesting.¹⁴⁵ Even the single example of a mother's influence in the *hengerdd* poetry testifies to the importance of maternal influence in transmitting the ethos and values of the society to children. In the *rhamantau*, only Peredur's mother exhibits any visible influence on her son's life, but she does not live to see him grow into a man. Good mothers, in literature, are subsumed into the lives of their sons; bad ones stand in the way of their children's development into fully-realised adults. Fiona Winward has noted the detrimental effects of motherhood on a noble mother's status in the court in the *Four Branches*: the decreased status of Rhiannon and Branwen after giving birth to an heir, and the fervent rejection of her offspring by Aranrhod, who seeks to avoid the same fate.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, mothers are necessary in establishing the nobility of their children's bloodlines, and there is something fundamentally troubled about the stories in which motherless heroes become childless kings. Nor is this anxiety limited to Welsh literature – *Beowulf*, for example, ends with just such a situation, and Clare Lees observes that 'while praising these dynasties, the poem leaves us in no doubt of their tenuous hold on life in the hall'.¹⁴⁷ Even the most heroic of men cannot completely escape the fact that they must be, unlike MacDuff of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, 'born of woman'.¹⁴⁸

The mothers of the Welsh Arthurian texts appear primarily to establish lines of familial connection and kinship between other characters. This is especially true of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, in which Arthur, Culhwch, Gorau, and Olwen are all related to one another despite never having

145Gwydion and Gilfaethwy can also be considered mothers in the Four Branches. See especially Roberta Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: crossing the borders of gender in Math,' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 35 (1988) 1-9.

146 Winward, Fiona. 'Some aspects of women in the Four Branches.' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 34 (Winter 1997), 77-106, p. 97.

147 Lees, Clare A. 'Men and Beowulf.' *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis 1994) 129-148, p. 141.

148Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth* V:3, ln. 6. Ed. G. K. Hunter (Harmondsworth 1967) p. 127.

previously met. Peredur's mother, like Gorau's, first hides him from his enemies and then sends him away to become a man under the influence of Arthur's court. Gereint is introduced first as a young knight, and it is his ageing father we are later introduced to. Owein's mother is not introduced, but he and his father were, before their introduction into the Arthurian corpus, genuine historical people; another tradition found in early modern manuscripts names a river goddess as his mother. Whether Modron ferch Afallach is his mother in *Iarlles y Ffynnon* is unclear, as he has already left her influence: indeed, a large part of the coming of age of young men is one of diminished maternal influence. Peredur follows his mother's advice only until his uncle's supersedes it; Gereint and Owein have, by their introduction, already cut the apron strings and been accepted as full participants in the Arthurian court. Culhwch's mother dies shortly after his birth, and his life is influenced instead by his stepmother, a figure whose long and troubled history that survives long past the middle ages as the dynastic tension between legitimate children of a single noble family continues to cause anxiety.

Old Women and Witches

At menopause, a woman left the stage of youth behind.¹⁴⁹ She might still exert influence over her children and children in-law, and certainly history shows us that a good many did, but her participation in dynastic reproduction was now over. Therefore old age is a dangerous period for the medieval woman, who stands to lose a good deal should she outlive her husband. Welsh law has very little discussion of widows, and literature is populated primarily by the young; there is little discussion anywhere of what precisely happened to women as they aged.¹⁵⁰

Because old age and widowhood are a particularly threatening combination to those outside the immediate family or sphere of influence, old woman in medieval tales are automatically suspect. They may be hags, or loathely ladies who exist in the narrative to teach the hero a lesson. Again

¹⁴⁹Charles-Edwards, *Kinship* 177.

¹⁵⁰Roberts, 'Seeking the middle-aged woman,' p. 33.

Ireland and Scotland have a tradition absent in Wales: the *Cailleach Bhéarra*, called by Anne Ross 'the Divine Hag of the Pagan Celts'¹⁵¹, a complex wilderness figure of uncontrollable feminine power at odds with the human world.¹⁵² Scottish tradition includes a Norwegian origin for the *cailleach*, for which reason Gwynn Jones found her virtually unknown in Wales, where there is no tradition of her.¹⁵³ However, old witch-women are found in a number of Welsh texts, and not necessarily human ones: similar aspects can be seen in the Nine Witches of Gloucester in *Peredur*, as well as the Black Witch and of course the wife of Custennin the shepherd in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a larger-than-life figure who one feels sure could not be contained or controlled by a merely mortal force.

Despite the appearance of 'gwidonod' and 'gwrachod' in certain texts, there is very little evidence of just what the medieval Welsh conception of a witch actually consists of. The Witches of Gloucester in *Peredur* are Otherworldly, to be sure, but their methods are martial rather than magical. Likewise, the mention of nine witches killed by Cai in *Pa gur* reveals no details of the fight and the Black Witch in *Culhwch ac Olwen* does nothing that might usually be associated with witches: she casts no spells, works no charms, uses no herbs, and in fact does very little except fight back fiercely when attacked. Even in later centuries, while witchcraft was as illegal in Wales as anywhere else in Britain, actual local concern appears limited. While the English establishment associated Welsh culture with witchcraft, within the borders, even when cases were brought to trial, the accused witches were unlikely to be executed.¹⁵⁴

Like the poets, witches may possess powers of prophecy and are able to cross the boundaries between male and female, but in this case the hybrid result is grotesque. Chroniclers of the middle ages were as likely to attribute supernatural powers, both evil and benign, to men as well as women, and the line between male and female practitioners of magic is not always well-delineated. The

¹⁵¹Ross, Anne. 'The divine hag of the pagan Celts,' *The Witch Figure*, Venetia Newall, ed. (London 1973) 139-164

¹⁵² Ó Cruaíoch, Gearóid. 'Continuity and adaptation in legends of Cailleach Bhéarra' *Béalóideas* 56 (1988), 153-178, p. 154.

¹⁵³Hull, Eleanor. 'Legends and traditions of the Cailleach Bheara,' *Folklore* 38:3 (1927), 225-254, p. 254.

¹⁵⁴Parkin, Sally. 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law in early modern Wales.' *Social History* 31:3 (2006) 295-318, p. 295. Richard Suggett, *A History of Magic and Witchcraft in Wales* (Stroud 2008), p. 10.

character of Myrddin, fathered by an incubus on a British princess, is one example, but contemporary writers also attributed magical powers to Owain Glyndŵr.¹⁵⁵ For instance, of the heavy storms which kept Henry IV's Welsh campaigns from bearing fruit, according to chronicler John Capgrave, 'there were many who supposed this was do[ne] by nigromancy, and by compelling of sprites.'¹⁵⁶

Parents in the early thirteenth century invoked 'Mol Walbee' to frighten their children, and stories that clung to her claimed she built Hay Castle in a single night, that 'owing to her occult powers, gigantic stature, and mysterious deeds, people thought she could accomplish any feat, however difficult'.¹⁵⁷ This description would not be out of place in the court list of *Culhwch*, especially as the attribution of great size has more in common with the populous giants of Welsh literature than the Witches of Caerloyw. Trevelyan also reports a tradition that while her husband feuded with King John, the lady sent the Queen 'four hundred kine and a bull, all milk-white with pink ears'.¹⁵⁸ Such colouring on animals in Welsh literature is an attested sign of Otherworldly origins. But this so-called witch, blamed by William Camden for drowning innocent victims in the River Wye, was in reality the doomed and unfortunate wife of William de Braose.

One dangerous and clearly magical enchantress does appear: Ceridwen, the foster-mother of Gwion Bach in *Ystoria Taliesin*. The keeper of the magical *pair awen*, she displays formidable magical powers, transitioning through several shapes before finding, swallowing, and later birthing the young Taliesin. Shapeshifting appears a recurring theme in tales of Welsh witches. In particular, Anne Ross has found a number of folktales associating them with hares. Even in these later tales, the witches' evil deeds are confined to souring their neighbours milk or interfering with hunting parties.¹⁵⁹ Even Aranrhod, who appears in the Fourth Branch to be a formidable sorceress, exhibits very little power over anything or anyone but her immediate family; when Gwydion summons an

¹⁵⁵Suggett, p. 9.

¹⁵⁶Capgrave, John. *John Capgrave's Abbreviation of Chronicles*, ed. Peter J. Lucas, EETS 285 (Oxford 1983) p. 219

¹⁵⁷Trevelyan, Marie. *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London 1909) p. 129.

¹⁵⁸*ibid.*

¹⁵⁹Ross, Anne. *Folklore of Wales* (Stroud: History Press 2001), pp. 147-48.

illusory fleet to threaten her island she seems to lack the defensive capability to protect it without assistance.¹⁶⁰ And Ceridwen's apparently significant power is ultimately thwarted by her own capacity for reproduction – by consuming Gwion she integrates him into herself rather than successfully eliminating him. Women's magic, like women's action, is limited in its impact, and requires a verbal component to enact any real change.

Witches need not actually appear old, and may, as Ceridwen, still be fertile. They are also found as caretakers and guardians of magical artefacts, glades, and holy wells. The nine maidens of *Preiddeu Annwn* may be considered such, and Cymidei Cymeinfoll, the giantess of the Second Branch who carries the Cauldron of Rebirth with her, may also be related.

Another construction of feminine virtue common to much of the rest of medieval literature is, of course, the female saint; however this is outside the scope of this project. Despite the ubiquitous Christianity of medieval Europe, most of the Welsh Arthurian texts are remarkably low on actual references to God, religion, and the Church; the wedding rites of *Gereint*, for instance, are no more overtly Christian than those of the Four Branches. While the secular prose literature and the hagiographies exhibit a number of similarities – namely the abduction episodes that form so much of the literary and historical threat to womanly virtue – the saintly model, so well defined by Cartwright, Henken and others, is largely absent from the Arthurian texts.¹⁶¹

Finally, medieval Arthurian tales, and many other stories of Celtic origin, are populated with a female figure scholars have suggested represents the kingdom the hero must win in order for his story to be complete. The concept itself is neither strictly Celtic nor unrealistic. Folktales and fairy stories through the early modern period are full of ambitious younger sons who strike out to find their fortune and end up marrying a princess whether by cleverness or trickery; 'The Man Marries the Princess' occupies thirty-eight places within the Aarne-Thompson classification of folktale

¹⁶⁰Hughes, Ian. *Math fab Mathonwy* (Dublin 2013) p. 13.

¹⁶¹Cartwright, Jane, *Feminine Spirituality and Sanctity in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff 2008) and Elissa R. Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Woodbridge 1987).

motifs.¹⁶² In real life as in literature, a noble daughter, especially one without brothers, could act as a means of mediating the distribution of her father's lands and represent the potential gains in both wealth and status for her husband. That Welsh legal tradition actually limited the possibilities of inheritance by daughters does not seem to have prevented the trope from turning up again and again in literature, but this disconnect between history and myth results in interpretations leaning more heavily on the theme of the sovereignty figure, whose long history in Celtic legend and scholarship deserves to be explored in more detail.

The Sovereignty Figure in Celtic Literature

Erica Sessle notes that 'scholarship has come to depend heavily on the sovereignty goddess for character definition', especially when dealing with female characters in Welsh and Irish.¹⁶³ Because the motif of the sovereignty figure recurs so often within the scholarship on gender in Celtic literature and mythology, especially that prior to the end of the twentieth century, it is important to explore its history and define precisely to what it refers and implies. The motif has its roots in the nineteenth-century work of Sir John Rhys, who linked the Welsh character Mabon ap Modron and his mother with the deities Maponos and Matrona from Roman-era Britain and Gaul.¹⁶⁴ Rhys was a philologist, and his reasoning for the connection is a clear case for the derivation of the Welsh names. This association was taken up by later scholars, in particular R.S. Loomis, who subsequently named Matrona as a major figure in early Welsh mythology and an antecedent of the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay.¹⁶⁵

Loomis' assertion was accepted by many of the major figures in the study of Welsh literature throughout the twentieth century, including Kenneth Jackson, Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Proinsias Mac Cana. In his recent article 'Medieval Welsh Literature and Pre-Christian Deities,'

162 Thompson, Stith. *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols. (Copenhagen 1955) vol. 5 p. 515.

163 Sessle, Erica J. 'Exploring the limitations of the sovereignty goddess through the role of Rhiannon', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 14 (1994) 9-13, p. 10.

164 Rhys, John. *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (London 1888) pp. 28-29.

165 Loomis, R.S. 'Morgan Le Fee and the Celtic goddesses', *Speculum* 20 (1945) 183-203 *passim*.

Ronald Hutton follows the development of this motif through the years, from Bromwich's suggestion that Matrona might also have inspired the Welsh saint Madrun, to the substantial influence of Anne Ross's *Pagan Celtic Britain*.¹⁶⁶

Rhys also presented Rhiannon of the First Branch as a euhemerised version of another early British goddess, and this interpretation too has been extremely influential.¹⁶⁷ That Rhiannon bears the marks of Otherworldly influence is clear from her magical horse and association with the *gorsedd*; the precise nature of that influence is less straightforward.¹⁶⁸ She came to be associated with Epona, a Gallo-Roman horse goddess, following a suggestion of Henri Hubert in 1925¹⁶⁹ and this was enthusiastically taken up by Anne Ross as part of her concept of a global 'mother goddess'.¹⁷⁰ This analysis privileges the maternal aspects of the goddess above other functions, which can present a dilemma when a character's behaviour seems to stem from other, more mundane motivations.¹⁷¹ Jaan Puhvel proposed a universally Indo-European ritual involving sacrificing a horse upon a new king's inauguration, with the implication that goddesses associated with horses were especially likely to also be related to sovereignty.¹⁷² Thomas Charles-Edwards expanded on this theme, suggesting that this symbolic marriage was performed by Celtic kings.¹⁷³ The conflation of horses with sovereignty stems from a dramatic description of an Irish inauguration ritual by Gerald of Wales.¹⁷⁴

Juliette Wood challenged the conflation of Rhiannon and Epona, pointing out that beyond the presence of a horse motif, the two characters have little in common, while Jessica Hemming states that according to her function in the *Mabinogi* tales, Rhiannon may not be a sovereignty

166Hutton, Ronald. 'Medieval Welsh literature and pre-Christian deities,' *CMCS* 61 (2011), p. 60.

167Rhys, *Lectures*, pp. 497-503.

168 While often associated with fertility, Rhiannon's part in the Four Branches would seem to contradict such a diagnosis, as a significant part of her story hinges on her childlessness.

169Hubert, Henri. *Divinités gauloises* (Macon 1925) pp. 187-90.

170Ross, Anne. *Pagan Celtic Britain* pp. 286-410.

171Valente, *Merched y Mabinogi* (Unpublished PhD thesis: Cornell University 1986) p. 6.

172Hutton, 'Pre-Christian deities,' p. 78.

173Charles-Edwards, Thomas. 'Native political organization in Roman Britain and the origin of MW *brenhin*,' *Antiquitates Indogermanicae*, ed. Mayrhofer (Innsbruck 1974) pp. 57-8.

174Cambrensis, Giraldus. *The Historical Worlds of Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. T. Wright (London 1863, repr. New York 1968), p. 138.

goddess at all.¹⁷⁵ The interpretation of female characters in Welsh literature as descendants of mythic archetypes was influenced by the work on Irish literature of Tomás Ó Máille on Queen Medb Chruachna, who in 1928 was the first to attribute her promiscuity to 'the degenerated behaviour of a one-time divinity'.¹⁷⁶ The Victorian and Edwardian editors of the Celtic texts had been disturbed by their apparent moral looseness, and Ó Máille's explanation of a sovereignty figure, representing the land and ritualistically married to the king, rescued Medb from her moralistic detractors and provided a satisfactory justification for her behaviour. In such a context, it makes perfect sense when the queen-as-kingdom replaces an old, feeble or incompetent king with a newer and more vigorous model, and regardless of the actual origins of this motif is it one that we find repeated in Celtic literature again and again.¹⁷⁷

The interpretation of Celtic heroes and heroines as solar gods and earth-goddesses did not spring entirely from even the antiquarians' fertile imaginations. The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* attests an Ériu as the wife of Mac Greine, and even the most skeptical may take note of characters whose names are genuinely translatable as 'Ireland, wife of the son of the Sun'. The stories of Lugaid Láigde in the Irish text *Cóir Anmann* ('Fitness of Names') and that of Niall and his brothers in *Echtra mac n-Echach Muigmedón* ('The Adventures of the sons of Eochaid Muigmedón') also explicitly reflect this theme. In the former, a prophecy says that whichever of the five sons of Dáire Doimthech, all called Lugaid, can catch a golden fawn will succeed to the throne. While hunting it, the young men stumble on a house occupied by a hag, and what is now a predictable story unfolds. Each of the older four brothers is propositioned by the old woman and each rejects her, until only the youngest, Lugaid Láigde, is willing to sleep with her. After the deed she becomes a beautiful young Faery woman and declares herself the Lady of Erin, promising that Lugaid Láigde will become king.¹⁷⁸ In one version of the text, the goddess sleeps with both Lugaid and his father,

¹⁷⁵Hutton, 'Pre-Christian deities,' p. 79.

¹⁷⁶Ó Máille, Tomás. 'Medb Chruachna,' *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 17 (1928) 129-46.

¹⁷⁷The idea that a ruling lady needs a male protector to defend her right to her land is by no means exclusively a mythological problem, and later chapters will explore the more mundane possibilities for the recurrence of the trope.

¹⁷⁸Stokes, Whitley. 'Cóir Anmann (Fitness of Names).' *Irische Text mit Wörterbuch. Dritte Serie*, 2 vols. E. Windisch and W. Stokes, eds. (Leipzig 1897) 288-411. p. 318.

allowing for an overarching theme of filial succession. Lugaid mac Con is one of the early high kings of Ireland and part of the country's origin-myth, called by Bromwich 'one of the most important pre-Goedelic inhabitants' of Ireland.¹⁷⁹

In *Echtra mac n-Echach Muigmedón*, Niall, the youngest and illegitimate son of Echach Muigmedón, goes hunting with his brothers to determine which of them will succeed their father. While camping for the night, each brother goes in search of water, and encounters an ugly old woman guarding a well. She offers him a drink in exchange for a kiss, which he refuses. One of the brothers kisses her and receives a lesser reward, but Niall makes love to her. She becomes a beautiful maiden and tells Niall she is the sovereignty of Ireland. He gives the water to his brothers in exchange for their support of his claim to the throne, and he goes on to found a dynasty of Irish high kings for five centuries.¹⁸⁰

In addition to explicitly presenting the rulership of Ireland as a shapechanging, Otherworldly woman, both of these tales include other motifs found throughout medieval literature. The transformed hag, surviving into later medieval literature in the form of the 'loathely lady' of *Sir Gawain* and Chaucer's Wife of Bath, is common in material stemming from Celtic and Icelandic sources, but Bromwich has found her extremely rare elsewhere until the late middle ages, suggesting a native origin.¹⁸¹ The hunt for a magical creature can also be found in a wide variety of literature through the period: the golden fawn in the Lugaid story is certainly reminiscent of the *addanc* in *Peredur* as well as the white stag, an Otherworldly creature found in *Gereint* and *Erec et Enide*, the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, and the fifteenth-century English poem *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. The appearance of the stag appears either to instigate the adventure, or signal that the characters have crossed a boundary between 'real' and 'supernatural' worlds.

Finally, the association between holy or magical women and water – whether a spring, a

¹⁷⁹Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes and the Breton lays,' *Études Celtiques IX* (1961), p. 449.

¹⁸⁰Stokes, Whitley, 'The death of Crimthann son of Fidach, and the adventures of the sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903): 172-207. According to Lovecy the text dates from the eleventh century or possibly earlier. See Ian Lovecy, 'The Celtic sovereignty theme and the structure of *Peredur*,' *Studia Celtica* 12-13 (1977-78), p. 134.

¹⁸¹Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes' p. 442.

well, or a cup – is well-attested.¹⁸² The Irish story *Baile in Scáil* ('The Phantom's Ecstatic Vision') is another sovereignty tale, though much later in its extant form, which involves a maiden, again representing the sovereignty of Ireland, passing a cup to the hero Conn as a symbol of kingship.¹⁸³ There are, of course, other examples. In the Welsh folktale of the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach, a supernatural water-maiden takes a local man for a husband, and in the Irish *Táin*, the battle-goddess Morrigan appears to CúChullain at a ford. Then there are the *vitae* of Saints Eluned and Gwenfrewi, in which the landing-places of the decapitated heads of the female saints are marked by the sudden appearance of a healing holy well.¹⁸⁴

The chief dilemma, as is so often the case when attempting to trace origins of Welsh motifs, is the lack of contemporary manuscript witnesses. Scholars have long relied on Irish texts to fill the gaps, but this necessarily presupposes a relationship between the two literary cultures that cannot be proven. Equally uncertain is how much, if any, of the history of these themes were understood or voluntarily co-opted by medieval Welsh writers. The Irish redactors trotted out the sovereignty stories for purposes that are not difficult to resolve. The author of *Echtra mac n-Echach Muigmedón* was *filidh* to the last high king of Niall's line, Maelsechlainn II, who had lost and finally regained the throne; Bromwich proposes that 'freshly adapting an ancient myth' might be a strategic propaganda move and a way to remind the people of Maelsechlainn's ancestors divinely-awarded rulership over Ireland.¹⁸⁵ She also notes that 'so profoundly felt was this conception of the marriage of the king with the goddess Ériu...that it remains implicit throughout the bardic poetry of the medieval and early modern period....'¹⁸⁶

A similar nostalgia for the glory days of ancient Britain is evident in the pens of the medieval Welsh writers. Throughout the middle ages Wales tended a nostalgia for the days of *Yr*

182Wood, Juliette. 'The fairy bride legend in Wales.' *Folklore* 103:1 (1992) 56-72, p. 60.

183This is dealt with in relationship to similar Germanic motifs by Michael Enright, *The Lady With the Mead Cup* (Dublin 2007).

184Rees, William Jenkins, *Lives of the Cambro-British Saints* (Llandoverly 1853) pp. 515-29; Cartwright, Jane. 'Dead virgins: feminine sanctity in medieval Wales', *Medium Aevum* 72 (2002) 1-28.

185Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes' p. 450.

186*ibid.*

Hen Ogledd, the 'Old North', realm of Urien Rheged and Taliesin, whose names provide panegyric comparison for the patrons of the *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr*. The *Mabinogi* tale *Breuddwyd Macsen* is the story of a Roman emperor who, sure enough, obtains sovereignty of Britain by marrying one of its princesses; not only does he gain Wales because of their relationship, but his new wife's brothers aid him in retaking the throne he had lost back in Rome. The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* set ostensibly medieval characters within a distant, fictional pre-Roman past.

The theme of a queen in place of the land, either replacing an elderly king with a younger lover voluntarily or being stolen away, recurs frequently in medieval Welsh tales, whether or not the redactors intended such symbolism or merely wanted to adapt extant native stories into the form of the newly-fashionable chivalric romance. The Tristan story, one of the most popular courtly love tales of the era, is one such: a Welsh version of the tale concludes with Arthur mediating the dispute between King Mark and Tristan over the right to Eryllt. He negotiates a solution between Mark and Tristan in which they share Eryllt, one while the trees have leaves and one when the branches are bare. Mark, as her lawful husband, gets the first choice, and chooses the winter, when there are no leaves on the trees, 'o achos mae hwyfa fyddde'r nos yr amser hwnnw' ('because in that season the night is longest').¹⁸⁷ Eryllt responds with an *englyn* gloating that because of the evergreen trees that never lose their leaves, he will never have her and she will be able to remain with Tristan.

The *Ystoria Trystan* makes its first appearance in manuscript form only in the sixteenth century.¹⁸⁸ This makes it difficult to pinpoint its place in the development of the Tristan story, or determine how much of it was influenced by native tradition, by the popularity of the French tale, or the Irish themes.¹⁸⁹ J. Gwenogvryn Evans considered the *englynion* sections to be a more ancient part of the text, as did Ifor Williams.¹⁹⁰ Rowland sees the ending, in which the lovers trick the husband into giving up his wife, as belonging to the tradition of *fabliaux* and the *malmarie*, that is,

¹⁸⁷Cross, Tom Peete. 'Welsh Trystan Episode,' *Studies in Philology* 17 (1912) 93-110, p. 105.

¹⁸⁸Cross, 'Welsh Trystan', p. 93.

¹⁸⁹The text appears to share some themes with the Irish *Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne*, which is attested around the same time and also seems to contain elements that are older than the manuscript versions themselves, and with the story of Deirdre from the Ulster Cycle.

¹⁹⁰Cross, 'Welsh Trystan,' p. 93. Ifor Williams, *Lectures on Welsh Poetry* (Dublin 1944) p. 19.

continental influence in a non-courtly tradition.¹⁹¹ However, a reference in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen* suggests a similar native story:

[Asswynaw y gyuarwys ohonaw ar...] Creiddylat merch Llud Llaw Ereint, y uorwyn uwyaf y mawred a uu yn Teir Ynys Prydein a'e Their Rac Ynys – ac am honno y may Gwythyr mab Greidawl a Gwynn mab Nud yn ymlad pob dyw kalan Mei uyth hyt dyt brawt[...]¹⁹²

The details are explained in a digression later in the tale. When Creiddylad runs off with Gwythyr, it provokes a war with Gwynn ap Nudd which claims both the lives and sanity of some of Arthur's other men. Arthur rides out to make peace between them, and in this case his judgement is that both suitors are to leave the maiden alone with her father until Judgement Day. In the meantime, Gwyn and Gwythyr will spend each May Day in single combat with one another, though only the final battle on Judgement Day will determine the victor.¹⁹³ The placement of the endless battles on May Day suggests a ritual association, but the exact nature of such festivities in early Britain is occluded.

Regardless of the extent to which any ancient rituals may have influenced, or indeed been understood by, medieval writers, the idea of a wife as representative of the possessions of a husband requires no great stretch of imagination, and a king's possessions are by definition greater than those of other men. Actually marrying heiresses to gain lands and titles was common practice for much of history, and requires no elaborate mythological reading to understand. The literary tradition of kidnapping and affairs of Arthur's Queen Gwenhwyfar, alluded to in Welsh poetry and appearing in much of the late medieval versions of the Matter of Britain, can be read as an echo of a Medb-like sovereignty figure whose behaviour becomes troubling, but just as easily as a realistic course of action within the medieval landscape. Therein lies much of the problem in an insistence on reading medieval heroines as fulfilling only the functions left by the absence of ancient goddesses. The near-complete lack of textual evidence supporting such figures means that such readings must of

191Rowland, *EWSP* p. 253.

192Bromwich, Rachel and D. Simon Evans. *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*. (Cardiff 1992) p. 13. '[Culhwch asked his gift in the name of...] Creiddylad, daughter of Lludd Llaw Erint, the most majestic maiden there ever was in the Three Islands of Britain and her Three Adjacent Islands. And for her Gwythyr son of Greidol and Gwyn son of Nudd fight each May Day forever until the Day of Judgement.' Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford 2007) p. 189.

193Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch*, pp. 35-36.

necessity include heavy speculation, but also ignores the actual contemporary context in which the texts which do survive exist. Medieval storytellers may well have been occupied with reworking ancient themes, but they were telling contemporary stories to contemporary audiences, and the texts reflect this. Valente describes the difficulties in limiting interpretation of female characters to their potentially pre-Christian origins from a purely literary standpoint: first, that it 'creates textual problems when characters make choices for very human reasons,' and that if the characters' actions are considered to be inevitable and predestined rather than individual characterisation, then it adds very little to our understanding of them.¹⁹⁴ It results in what Findon calls 'a radical dehistoricizing of the text, its characters, and its concerns...bearing the weight of a mythic past that can be glimpsed only dimly'.¹⁹⁵

Why, then, this insistence on calling up the shadows of shadow Celtic goddesses? Much of this rests on the fascination of the antiquarians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with artistic primitivism and the 'noble savage', found more recently in the jungles of Africa or the North American plains but also nostalgically created in the mists of the Celtic past. From the seventeenth century onward an enthusiasm for 'druidism' had prevailed amongst the self-styled scholars of the Age of Enlightenment; an exhibit in 2012 at the British Museum displayed the notes, books, and even souvenir teacups commemorating the establishment's rediscovery of the druids.¹⁹⁶ The writers and anthropologists of the late Victorian years appeared to very much wanted a nurturing mother-goddess, perhaps because the post-reformation Church had never found a comfortable way of dealing with the feminine aspects of the divine after abandoning the Virgin Mary to the Catholics.¹⁹⁷ Their influence can be seen in what Juliette Wood calls 'the work of Victorian syntheists — sweeping through enormous quantities of data for the pattern which

¹⁹⁴Valente, *Merched y Mabinogi*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁵Findon, *Woman's Words*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁶The topic appears to have been revived, as at the time of writing, an upcoming talk in the museum is scheduled titled 'Inventing traditions: Druids and Celts in the eighteenth century' for 22 January, 2016.

¹⁹⁷Hutton, 'Pre-Christian deities,' p. 63. Hutton notes the Victorian and modern-day preoccupation with establishing a 'single great goddess, identified with the earth, fertility and motherhood'; the post-Catholic reasoning is my own suggestion.

informs it all'.¹⁹⁸ Much of this also relies on the imaginative translations — and creations — of Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) and Edward 'Celtic' Davies, two inventors of the 'druidic revival'.¹⁹⁹

This is, of course, the precise problem with much of the reconstructions of Celtic life, literature and religion stemming from the Celtic Revival that began in the eighteenth century. That it came to a head during the industrial revolution, a period of escalating tension between the traditional and modern, is perhaps unsurprising, but by this time the effects of Williams and Davies had become entrenched in the popular ideas of the ancient Celts. Even in the face of contradictory evidence, such tenacious fictions can be difficult to dislodge. Patrick Sims-Williams has also suggested that the Welsh and Irish people themselves may have encouraged this perception through the ages, from medieval writers Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gerald of Wales, all the way through the ages to a conference on 'the Celtic consciousness' in 1970s Toronto.²⁰⁰ The portrayal of Ireland by English writers is a ready example of how such perceptions can be manipulated. At the time of Bede, Ireland was still the island of the saints, from whence came Columba and a number of missionary scribes; a few centuries later it was described as a country of barbarians in need of the civilising influence of Norman rulership.²⁰¹

By the middle of the twentieth century, an unsubstantiated idea of a prehistoric, gynocentric society amongst the ancient Celts had become popular with a feminist movement eager to rediscover the feminine within spirituality; it is from this that much of the modern 'goddess study' stems. Wood observes that while the scholarship drawn upon by neo-pagan reconstructionists is not in itself part of the worldview, 'a number of modern Goddess-studies resemble influential nineteenth-century models of culture'.²⁰²

198Wood, Juliette. 'The Concept of the Goddess.' *The Concept of the Goddess*, Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, eds. (London 1996) 8-25, p. 10.

199Beresford Ellis, Peter. 'The fabrication of "Celtic" astrology', *The Astrological Journal* 39:4 (1996) n.pag.

200Sims-Williams, Patrick. 'The visionary celt: the construction of an ethnic preconception.' *CMCS* 11 (1986) 71-96, p. 77.

201*ibid.* p. 76.

202Wood, 'Concept of the goddess,' p. 9.

Here, then, are two possible non-linguistic motivations for the endurance of the motif of the euhemerised sovereignty figure and divine feminine. Hutton's conclusion is, essentially, that the nineteenth century, in the midst of a real anxiety over the role of the natural in an increasingly industrial world and still feeling the absence of a feminine aspect of divinity, found itself in dire need of a mother goddess.²⁰³ It therefore created one, as a way of reaching back to an allegedly simpler, primarily agricultural past.²⁰⁴ That this was as especially potent recipe in Wales, an exploited and economically depressed colony being drowned in an attack on its language and received notions of its own inferiority, is not surprising.

Additionally — not necessarily alternately — the feminist movements that reached a pinnacle in the twentieth century needed a mother-goddess too. In this case, a post-war feminist movement that coincided with protests against the Vietnam war, there was an emphasis as well on the maternal, peaceful nature of the feminine divine. Wood summarises thus:

Typical of this more radical feminist theology is the belief that the feminine has somehow been 'lost' or deliberately repressed...[and] is therefore sought outside the context of organised religion and/or historically prior to its appearance. In addition, religion and society are linked in a very direct way; the assumption being that where 'goddesses' are worshipped, women are empowered with a status equal to if not higher than that of men, and further, that feminine power is ecologically harmonious and pacifistic.²⁰⁵

There is little actual historical evidence for this scenario, and indeed, these same pacifists would likely have been horrified at the bloodthirstiness of the goddesses actually worshiped by ancient peoples. It nevertheless enables feminist theorists to reclaim the otherwise questionable actions of early female literary figures and, as Valente argues and Ó Máille began, to explain seemingly negative aspects in a positive light.²⁰⁶

The evidence, then, is sparse – smoke but no fire, only a few dim sparks glittering in the historical coals. That there once existed some tradition of sovereignty, possibly linked to the land and emblematised by a divine female figure, I am happy to accept. What influence that figure might

203Hutton, 'Pre-Christian deities', p. 63.

204Sims-Williams, Patrick., 'Visionary Celt', p. 72.

205Wood, 'Concept of the goddess', p. 9.

206Valente, p. 4.

have on the texts that exist, it is much harder to say. Through the Arthurian texts discussed here, it is possible in many instances to read the presence of sovereignty figures. It is not, however, strictly necessary, nor in many cases is it productive. That the storytellers and redactors of medieval Wales synthesised a good amount of native material is evident, as even the few surviving texts engage in a healthy intertextuality. While undoubtedly aware of the metaphorical underpinnings of their sources, they were innovative in their handling, and the Arthurian tails must be considered as products of their contemporary cultural, social and literary contexts.

Culhwch ac Olwen

Culhwch ac Olwen is the 'longest and earliest' of the native Welsh Arthurian prose tales and the most revealing glimpse we have of the characteristics of an early native Arthurian tradition in Wales.²⁰⁷ It also exhibits a bewildering amount of intertextuality, drawing episodes and characters from a wide array of sources. Its heroes may be cut from a heroic cloth, but also draws heavily from folklore and romance, and the text focuses primarily on the collective masculinity of the *teulu* in achieving dominion over a supernatural landscape. Even this occasionally two-dimensional heroism is not straightforward. The overtly aggressive actions of Arthur and his war-band, presented without explicit comment, are not universally commended – like the author of the *Llywarch Hen* poems, the creator of *Culhwch* offers an ultimately ambivalent view of the heroic ethos and its effects. A focus on hair and beards as signifiers of kinship and masculinity is prevalent, and both men and women cross the boundaries of monstrous and mortal. This chapter will briefly discuss the context of the text and its manuscript witnesses; examine the portrayal of the family unit, both by ties of blood and those of loyalty; the significance and use of the 'barbering motif', and the gendered portrayals of giants and monstrous creatures within the text. These aspects, when combined, present a distinctly native text, rooted in the early Welsh tradition but also demonstrating the authors' and audience's familiarity with other historical and European influences.

There are two manuscript witnesses to *Culhwch*: the Red and White Book versions, and of these the earlier, a fragment in the White Book, is incomplete. Containing only the first two-thirds of the story, the fragmentary version breaks off at the end of the episode of Wnach the Giant and leaves out several important sections: the quest for the oldest animals, the rescue of Mabon fab Modron, the beard of Dillus Farfog, the fight with the Black Witch, and the death of Ysbadadden himself.²⁰⁸ The Red Book version, according to Bromwich and Evans, does not appear to be a direct

²⁰⁷Roberts, Brynley. 'Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saints Lives', *The Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff 1991) 73-96, p. 73.

²⁰⁸Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff 1992), hereafter *CO*, pp. ix-xi.

copy; rather both appear to derive from an earlier lost exemplar.²⁰⁹ However, the hand of Hywel Fychan, the primary Red Book scribe, has been identified as having inserted a passage in that manuscript, which would seem to confirm that at the very least he had familiarity with both copies.²¹⁰ In any case, the differences are minor enough, and their agreement significant enough, to suggest the tale had reached a level of stability by the fourteenth century when its extant versions were copied.²¹¹

This is not especially surprising, given that it appears to have been in circulation for some three centuries prior to inclusion in the White Book and likely existed, at least partially, in oral form even before that. As with the majority of medieval Welsh prose tales, a firm date of composition cannot be agreed upon. The general consensus has followed the findings of Idris Foster in 1935, who proposed a date of around 1100; his conclusion was followed without significant challenge in later years by R. S. Loomis, Rachel Bromwich, D. Simon Evans, O. J. Padel and Helen Fulton, among others.²¹² More recently, Simon Rodway has suggested amending the date to 1150 or even later, but it remains reflective of what appears to be a purely native Arthurian tradition. Without dwelling too long on the arguments for dating *Culhwch*, the lack of Geoffrey of Monmouth's influence is a crucial factor in our understanding of it, raising questions of its origins, influences and transmission.

More than any of the other Welsh prose tales, *Culhwch* reads as if meant to be performed. Much attention has previously been paid to the oral history from which it is generally agreed to have derived, particularly by Brynley Roberts and Sioned Davies.²¹³ By examining the performative

209Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. xi.

210Charles-Edwards, G. 'The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', *National Library of Wales Journal* (1980) 247-8.

211Bromwich and Evans note that this agreement consists of 'reproducing...mistakes which are common to both: the triple repetition of *merch* for *mab*...of *rongomyant* for *rongomynyat*...and of *gouynynat* for *gouynnyat*...of (*b*)*aryf twrch* for (*b*)*baryf trwch*...of *dissull* for *Dillus*...and in the incorrect inversion of the relative in *yssyd yssit*' as well as the identical order of the names in the Arthurian Court List. (xi) The 2012 printing goes into additional detail on the specificities of the two versions.

212Foster, Idris. *Astudiaeth o chwedl Culhwch ac Olwen*. MA Thesis, Aberystwyth 1935. p 37: 'Dangosodd y rhain y gellir gosod dyddiad y crynhoad llenyddol cyn 1150.' This was partially in response to academic discussions between J Gwenogvryn Evans and David Nutt, the latter of whom suggested in *Folklore xxi* that Glewlwyd's mention of wars in India with Arthur required the author to be familiar with Geoffrey's account of Arthur's foreign wars.

213Roberts, 'Culhwch', *AOW* p. 73, Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd* (Cardiff 1995) pp. 63-71 and 'Performing

aspects of the text, they suggest that a collection of oral tales were joined together to form a mostly coherent whole, whether that occurred on parchment or in the great hall.²¹⁴ It is also worth noting, however, that *all* medieval stories were meant to be read aloud. Even into the nineteenth century, common practise when reading to one's self involved murmuring the words quietly, aloud; certainly the limitations on literacy and availability of books in the middle ages mean as a matter of course that stories, even when written down, were considered first and foremost in an oral medium. Indeed, Davies points out that all medieval literature was ultimately 'written to be heard' and that even with a manuscript to hand, the text would be read aloud to an audience; the concept of aurality might be even more important than orality in this medium.²¹⁵ Furthermore, the storytelling tradition of medieval Wales, like that of Ireland, was both respected and highly sophisticated, with bards going through years of training before being considered qualified. An oral tradition need not mean a primitive one, and some of the tension in classifying *Culhwch* seems to stem from the projection of modern concepts of literary authority, from the competing desires to see a much older composition or a sophisticated literary achievement.²¹⁶ Considering what we understand of the Welsh bardic culture over the centuries, there seems to be no reason to assume these must be exclusive states.

Culhwch, like other medieval texts from Wales and elsewhere, appears to be a hybrid product; not a verbatim transcription of an oral performance but a literary composition based on a popular live show. Even if *Culhwch* was composed in the middle of the twelfth century, after the original appearance of Geoffrey's *Historia*, the tradition it portrays is distinctly free of its influence.²¹⁷ It is that rarest of things — unique, in fact, in secular Arthurian prose literature: evidence of a genuine, native, Welsh tradition of Arthur in the popular imagination independent of Geoffrey of Monmouth and his 'very old book in the British tongue'.²¹⁸ It exists within the genre of

Culhwch ac Olwen', *Arthurian Literature XXI* (2004) 29-52.

214 Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, p. 64.

215 Davies, 'Performing Culhwch', p. 29.

216 Roberts, 'Culhwch', *AOW*, p. 79.

217 Rodway, Simon. 'The date and authorship of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a reassessment', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 49 (2005): 21-44, p. 40. Tatlock, however, did see some references as signs of Geoffrey's influence. See *Legendary History*, pp. 195-97.

218 Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge:

truly Welsh folk-stories, but also within the tradition of 'wooing tales' such as those found in Irish tradition.²¹⁹

Culhwch ac Olwen is a collection of international tale-types, more folktale than epic, and as such its characterisation, not only with regard to gender but many other aspects as well, can appear simplistic and archetypal. The author puts thoughts and emotions into his characters' heads and hearts, but spends almost no time analysing them: if a character is sad then he is sad; if he is angry he is angry, and emotions provide explanation for the characters' actions without necessarily having an explanation themselves. This is hardly limited to folktales, or *Culhwch*, or Welsh literature, for that matter. Wendy Doniger, in her study of bedtricks and masquerade in medieval literature, says 'when myths tell us what happened, they do not always tell us why the people in the story did what they did or how they felt about what happened to them'.²²⁰ In *Culhwch*, characters are guided through their adventures by external forces rather than their own inner motivations. The women of the tale seldom leave their designated domestic sphere, and their limited movement outside has a troubled quality: Culhwch's stepmother finds herself walking on the edges of her new husband's domain near the house of a hag, while Olwen slips away from her father's house to wash her hair, but neither of them actually leave the confines of the area ruled by the men who have control of their lives. The giantess wife of Custennin the shepherd, despite her formidable physical presence, is also limited in movement to her familial land, and even the death of the Black Witch occurs within her own home. While Culhwch's mother escapes the domestic sphere, her movement is accompanied by a tragic breakdown and results in her death. For a story so dependent on the ability of its heroes to dash all about the countryside, the women are remarkably static. Movement and action belong to the men, who are built in the warrior model. Their victories prove the propaganda of the early poets, that the right group of virtuous men working together is capable of achieving

Boydell 2007) p. 4.

219Rees, Alwyn and Brynley Rees. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London 1961) pp. 259-278.

220Doniger, Wendy. *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade* (Chicago 2000) p. xviii.

anything. But while the men are portrayed superficially as heroes, the text also presents manhood as occasionally and problematically monstrous. Meanwhile, feminine nature is given but few redeeming qualities, and the most complimentary thing that is explicitly said about any of the female characters is that some of them are appropriately decorative. The first section will discuss the portrayal of gender roles within the family structure and courtly hierarchy presented in the text. The second will examine the significance of monstrosity, its bodily manifestation, and the significant connection between masculinity and facial hair that recurs throughout the narrative.

Heroes, Ladies, and Family Dynamics

The heroes of *Culhwch ac Olwen* are men. This is an obvious point, especially as the heroes of most adventure literature for the past two millennia are men, but in this case there is very little sign of feminine influence on their ultimate victory. In the poetry of the *cynfeirdd* and much of the *Gogynfeirdd* which exemplifies the heroic genre, women are most notable by their absence. This presents a different discourse to that of the romantic poetry of the continent, Dafydd ap Gwilym and the *Cywyddwyr*, or even the Old English epic, over which looms the terrifying shadow of Grendel's mother. *Culhwch* is a story about men — men against magic, against witches, against monsters, about brotherhood and loyalty between men, and ultimate masculine victory. While different in form from the old heroic sagas, in its own way it recalls the same value system, especially as concerns the sanctity of male unity. C.M. Bowra says that ‘a hero’s love for his friend is different from his love for his wife or family, since it is between equals and founded on an identity of ideals and interests.’²²¹ The implication is, of course, that relationships between men and women are *not* between equals, and that their occupation of disparate social spheres necessarily prevents those shared ideals and interests. This view, while dominant within much medieval writing (especially and unsurprisingly that of churchmen) was not completely uncontested in the middle ages, but the author of *Culhwch* presents it, as with the rest of his tale, without editorial comment. It is clear, for

²²¹Bowra, C.M. *Heroic Poetry* (London 1962) p. 64.

instance, that while *Culhwch* fits in the category of 'wooing tale' about a lovesick young man seeking a bride, the romance is entirely secondary, and this bond between male companions is the driving force of the adventure.²²²

The warrior masculinity of *Culhwch ac Olwen* is in the model of the old heroic poetry presented by the Chadwicks and discussed in the previous chapter, privileging male companionship and brotherhood over other relationships. There is little question that the men of this period, like every other time period in human history, could actually be devoted husbands and fathers, and the family unit has always been an important one. The literary and poetic forms celebrating their deeds, however, consistently erase all domestic aspects of these men, making only warriors of them, as if they exist in a purely idealistic world where victory and comradeship in arms are paramount. This is the basis for the warband of Arthur's men in *Culhwch*, though it is a wonder-tale rather than a panegyric, an energetic adventure story of supernatural exploits, and for most of them there is actually little chance of death at all. As Padel argues, 'The true heroic ethos, finely displayed in the *Gododdin*, with its warrior nobility willing to stand hopelessly against overwhelming odds for the sake of their honour and their ruler, is far removed from the no-holds-barred cunning of the folk tale, typically illustrated in *Culhwch*.'²²³ Arthur and his men here – as in the poems discussed in the next chapter – are folk heroes, giant-killers, fantastical characters based loosely on a heroic value system.

While the actuality of an early heroic society as portrayed in literature is difficult to verify, *Culhwch* is not attempting to reflect reality. Like Arthur himself, whether this period actually existed in a form corresponding with writers' treatment of it is less important than the impact that treatment had on the dominant literary paradigm of the period. The image of this ancient heroic society was vital to Wales' self-image throughout the medieval period. The medieval *beirdd* copied ancient styles, and this adherence to tradition forms a large part of the difficulty with linguistic and

222. Rees, Alwyn and Brynley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London 1961), p. 259ff.

223. Padel, O.J. *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff 2013) p. 16.

stylistic methods of determining a date for much of the surviving poetry. Not only did Welsh, unlike English, remain stable for several centuries, but the *Gogynfeirdd* were prone to using archaic turns of phrase and untroubled by modern concepts of intellectual property. The literary characters of post-Roman Britain continued to make their voices heard, as later poets attributed their own works to Taliesin, Aneirin, or Myrddin to imbue them with an air of historical authority. For this reason, portrayal of a heroic ethos lasted considerably longer in Wales than in England, where the Norman influence of post-conquest France had shifted much of the popular literature toward romance and the troubadour lyric by the middle of the twelfth century.²²⁴

Despite *Culhwch* being more comedic folktale than heroic saga, it presents this same simplified, hegemonic view of warrior masculinity throughout. The goal of the plot may be seeking out a wife for Culhwch, but the actual romance is secondary to the men's adventures and, indeed, the male bonding of the *teulu* with new initiates Culhwch and Goreu. Emotional, romantic aspects are severely downplayed, as Culhwch's sudden feelings are entirely externally motivated, inflicted on him by a curse, and his interaction with Olwen almost non-existent. The all-important generosity of the heroic British king is exemplified by Arthur, who promises Culhwch any boon he can ask for (excepting a short list of his personal and important possessions) and explained by him explicitly when he tells Cai, 'ydym wyrda hyt tra yn dygyrcher. Yd ytuo mwyhaf y kyuarws a rothom, mwyuwy uyd yn gwrdaaeth ninheu ac an cret ac an hetmic.'²²⁵ This was the dilemma of the Welsh petty kings in the early Middle Ages, and one that will follow Arthur throughout his literary career: to be generous, a king must be wealthy; to be wealthy, he must conquer. These are not kings who can remain holed up in a court ruling over distant lands, but must see to those lands, and to their acquisition and administration, personally. When the poems in the *Llyfr Taliesin* list the many generous gifts the poet has received from Urien Rheged, Gwallawg or Cynan Garwyn, it is

224Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford 2004) pp. 22-23

225Bromwich and Evans. *CO*, p. 7-8. 'We are noblemen as long as others seek us out. The greater the gifts we bestow, the greater will be our nobility and our fame and our honour.' Davies, Sioned. *The Mabinogion* (Oxford 2007) p. 183

combined with counts of the many enemies they have seen slaughtered and the cattle they have raided.²²⁶ It is all part of the medieval propaganda machine, used by the Welsh princes and perpetuated by professional poets: fight for this king, make his glory greater, and you too will have a share in the spoils! Warriors of renown then seek out these great kings, and fight for them in return for gifts, mead, and the right to tell others they are a member of a great lord's *teulu*. This is the assumption Arthur and Cai make about Culhwch and his arrival at Celliwig's door.

Culhwch himself is a version of the *bel inconnu*, the Fair Unknown, a figure especially popular in continental tales but also found in Welsh and Irish texts. This is his coming-of-age story, in which his journey leads to his acceptance into the *teulu*, and thereby male companionship, of a more powerful lord. The Fair Unknown, a popular recurring motif for medieval Arthurian writers, is a model of masculine youth, of a kind of unfinished manhood whose incredible potential must only be unlocked by the influence of adult masculinity.²²⁷ Sometimes the impetus is provided by a lady, as happens – though indirectly – in *Culhwch*, but the young character's growth is always concluded by the mentorship of male members of the court. The trope may have had its roots in Celtic sources, as it has been suggested the original archetype for this motif was linked with Pryderi and Mabon.²²⁸ He is certainly found, whether by Celtic or continental influence or both, as the hero of *Peredur*. Leah Haught lists a number of the most common tropes of the Fair Unknown tales in French including 'sparrowhawk contests, seduction by a fairy, fighting with giants, demanding boons (including knighthood), youth and beauty of heroes, loathly ladies, fighting brothers, total victory over opponents, tournaments to re-instate heroes in Arthurian society, and 'happy' endings in marriage'.²²⁹ These elements appear to have developed within the romance genre – from which the author of *Culhwch* borrows liberally – but need not all be present within the same text. Another common aspect of the trope is a lack of knowledge of their own paternity and family lines, which

226Williams, Ifor. *The Poems of Taliesin*. English version ed. J. E. Caerwyn Williams (Dublin 1968), passim.

227Haught, Leah. "The Fair Unknown: A Bibliographic Essay" TEAMS: Camelot Project at the University of Rochester.

228*ibid.*

229*ibid.*

would likely have been unacceptable to the audience of *Culhwch*, not to mention making difficult the connection between the hero, Arthur, and Custennin's wife that provides the impetus for action.²³⁰ In continental texts the young hero is often discovered, however, to be a relative of Gawain and therefore of Arthur, much as Culhwch is. This aspect of the trope is subverted, then, but not entirely abandoned, by the hair-cutting scene — Culhwch knows who he is, but Arthur, before that, does not.

Olwen does not seduce Culhwch — he is the one to go in search of her — yet she is of supernatural origin, and he is bound to her by forces outside his own control. Certainly our hero is young and handsome. Unlike the Four Branches, which omits descriptions of even its main players, the author of *Culhwch* spends several lines on dramatic descriptions of the hero's cloak, his armour, the birds circling around his head and the clods of dirt thrown up by his horse's hooves; his entrance to Celliwig is grand indeed.

Mynet a oruc y mab ar orwyd penlluchlwyd pedwar gayaf gauygygwng carngragen, a frwyn eur kymibiawc yn y penn. Ac ystrodur eur anllawd y danaw, a deu par arywnhyeit lliueit yn y law. Gleif (enillec) yn y law, kyuelin dogyn gwr yndi o drum hyt awch. Y gwaet y ar y gwynt a dygyrchei; bydei kynt no'r gwlithin kyntaf o'r konyn hyt y llawr, pan uei uwyaf y gwlith mis Meheuin. Cledyf eurdwrn ar y glyn a racllauyn eur itaw, ac ays eucrwydyr arnaw, a lliw lluchet nef yndi, a llloring elifeint yndi. A deu uilgi uronwynyon urychyon racdaw, a gordtorch rudeur am uynwgyl pob yn o cnwch yscwyd hyt yskuarn. [...] Gwerth trychan mu o eur gwerthuawr a oed yn y archenat a'e warthafleu (sangharwy), o benn y glyn hyt ym blayn y uys.²³¹

This vivid description conveys an image of a young man sent off in style, but also suggests more potential than experience. A golden sword is impressively decorative but not especially useful, and there is little to suggest Culhwch is proficient with the battle-axe he carries. The emphasis on weaponry — the spears, axe and sword — indicate martiality, and combined with the recitation of the

²³⁰In other versions, the child knows the identity of his father (usually Gawain), who remains ignorant until the pivotal moment. In a Celtic milieu, this recalls the Irish story of Cú Chulainn unknowingly killing his son Connla.

²³¹Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, pp. 3-4. 'The boy went off on a steed with a gleaming grey head, four winters old, well-jointed stride, shell-like hoofs, and a tubular gold bridle-bit in its mouth, with a precious gold saddle beneath him, and two sharp spears of silver in his hand. He had a battle-axe in his hand, the length of the forearm of a full-grown man from ridge to edge. It would draw blood from the wind; it would be swifter than the swiftest dewdrop from the stalk to the ground when the dew is heaviest in the month of June. He had a gold-hilted sword on his thigh and its blade of gold, with a gold-chased shield, the colour of heaven's lightning, and its rim of ivory. And there were two spotted, white-breasted greyhounds in front of him, with a collar of red gold around the neck of each from shoulder-swell to ear....The precious gold in his buskins and stirrups, from the top of his thigh to the tip of his toe, was worth three hundred cows.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, pp. 180-81.

monetary worth of his equipment is clearly meant to present him as the heir of a successful warlord whose prowess has been rewarded with treasure. However, only the romantic leads, not the warriors, are described in such detail, and as the narrative plays out Culhwch, like his sword, is shown to be primarily decorative.

Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr, having failed to dissuade Culhwch from storming into the hall, tells Arthur that he has never seen such a fine young man in all their days and all their travels together. The boy demands a symbolic boon which leads to his inclusion amongst the warriors of Arthur's household; knighthood in the way portrayed by the *rhamantau* or continental romance was not an aspect of early medieval Welsh courtly society. And of course, there are giants to be fought in plenty; the resolution of the main plot and several smaller threads are based around it.

The narrative of *Culhwch* depends on repetition, and so later in the story, another unknown young man appears. The son of Custennin the shepherd is given no name by the text until the incident in the castle of Wrnach Gawr, after he has been travelling with the warriors for some time. The observers say he is 'goreu dyn' when he accompanies Cai and Bedwyr into the castle, after which he becomes known as Goreu ('best').²³² This onomastic episode may be an attempt to explain a corruption of an earlier attested name, *Custennin Gorneu* (Custennin [Constantine] of Cornwall).²³³ The name also appears in *Gereint* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, as well as the Triad of the Three Exalted Prisoners in which he is listed as the rescuer of Arthur.²³⁴

Goreu's first appearance in the text echoes episodes in other medieval Welsh tales. He is hidden by his mother in a coffer to protect him from the wrath of Ysbaddaden, who has killed all her other sons. His emergence from concealment within a vessel is similar to others in Welsh tradition: particularly the discovery of the child Taliesin in a small coracle by Elffin in the *Ystoria Taliesin* and the 'second birth' of Lleu Llaw Gyffes in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*:

Val yd oed Wydyon diwarnawt yn y wely, ac yn deffrol, ef a glywei diaspat yn y gist is y draet. Kyny

²³²Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 31.

²³³Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 272.

²³⁴Bromwich, Rachel. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*. Third Edition. (Cardiff 2006) p. 146.

bei uchel hi, kyuuch oed ac y kigleu ef. Sef a oruc ynteu, kyuodi yn gyflym, ac agori y gist. Ac ual y hegyr, ef a welei uab bychan yn ryuaw y ureicheu o blyc y llen, ac yn y guascaru.²³⁵

and

O'r ach[os], yvo a odsyngodd J ben tu a'r llawr ac ddechreuodd gyhuddo J anfforttun drwy ddywedud, wrth droi J wynneb tu ac adreff, J vod ef yn vwy i annap a'i anfforttun nog vn dyn yn yr holl uyd. Yn yr amser J troes a meddwl ynnddo ef J droi yn ol i geuyn J edrych pa beth a oedd ynn y gwrth gryw. Ynn y man J kauasef gorwgyl ne vol kroen ar gyuair talken kriadur o ddynn.²³⁶

These examples do suggest tradition in Wales involving boys hidden in bags, boxes, and cupboards who then grow up to be great heroes and significant figures. Leslie Ellen Jones observes that:

A reader prone to believing that literature reflects the real life of the society that produced it might be forgiven for imagining that the medieval Welsh possessed the secret of prepackaged boy mixes — just pop in a lined container, incubate, and voilà! Open the lid and out pops a boy! No tedious pregnancy, no messy afterbirth, and all you have to do is come up with a name for him (usually more of a problem than might be expected).²³⁷

What this allows the author, and the characters, to accomplish is more than just giving a hero figure a miraculous birth, a commonality noted over the years by more than one scholar, from Lord Raglan to Joseph Campbell.²³⁸ The box, coffer, and coracle are easily recognisable as surrogate wombs, and the boy's emergence from it symbolises a second birthing process. The fact that none of these boys are previously named, or are named only temporarily as children, further illegitimises their original birth; they have no prior identity. Therefore, having these heroes born a second time, without the need for a mother, allows the male kin-group to usurp the female power of reproduction. That these are all exceptional men is clearly linked to the child's removal from maternal control. While other instances in Welsh literature attest to the importance of maternal kin and the responsibility of the mother as transmitter of ethical codes, these examples belie an anxious ambivalence about a mother's power to shape her children. The mother's damaging feminine

²³⁵Hughes, Ian. *Math uab Mathonwy* (Dublin 2013) p. 10. 'One day, as Gwydion was in his bed, and waking up, he heard a cry from the chest at his feet. Although it was not loud, it was loud enough for him to hear it. He got up quickly and opened the chest. As he opened it, he could see a small boy waving his arms free of the folds of the sheet and throwing it aside.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 55.

²³⁶Ford, Patrick K. *Ystoria Taliesin* (Cardiff 1992), p. 69. 'Because of that, he lowered his head to the ground and began bewailing his misfortune, saying, as he turned his face toward home, that his misfortune and his adversity were as great as any man in the whole world. Then his thought turned to turning back to see what thing was in the bow-net. There he found a coracle or skin bag that had been covered above and below. Then he took his knife and gave a cut on the skin, revealing the forehead of a human creature.'

²³⁷Jones, L. 'Boys in boxes: the recipe for a Welsh hero', *Heroic poets and poetic heroes in Celtic tradition: a festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*. JF Nagy and LE Jones, eds. (Dublin, 2005), 207-225 pp. 207-08.

²³⁸*ibid.*

influence is diminished, and the boy-hero is able to reach his fullest potential as a warrior because he has been, at least symbolically, under purely male control for the entirety of his acknowledged life. In the case of Lleu of the Fourth Branch, whose elder twin brother Dylan is christened immediately upon his birth, it is clear that the 'pethan' Aranrhod leaves behind is by no means yet a complete child.²³⁹ It is only after Gwydion takes it home and incubates it for nearly a year — certainly a full nine-month gestation — within the chest at the foot of his bed that a real baby boy emerges.

The young Taliesin has already lived some time as the boy Gwion Bach, who accidentally tasted the mixture his foster-mother Ceridwen meant to give to her son to grant him wisdom.²⁴⁰ After a magical battle with her in which he transforms into various animals and she changes shape to pursue him, he becomes a grain of wheat which she, in the shape of a chicken, eats. He gestates fully in her womb and then remains a baby for forty years before Elffin discovers him in a salmon weir. Meanwhile Goreu is not a baby when he emerges from the coffer in his parents' house, but by this time must be nearly a young man. However, his sheltered existence means he has not been allowed to grow and mature as a man, and he flowers only after his adoption into the ranks of Arthur's *teulu*. The case of the rescue of Mabon in *Culhwch* may fulfil a similar function, as he was not abandoned by his mother at a young age but stolen from her, and has since been imprisoned.

Ac y kerdassant hyt pann deuthant am y uagwyr a'r karcharawr, yny uyd kwynuan a griduan a glywynt am y uagwyr ac wy. Gwrhryr a dywawt, 'Pa dyn a gwyl yn y maendy hwnn?' 'Oia wr, yssit le idaw y gwynaw y neb yssyd yma. Mabon uab Modron yssyd yma yg carchar, ac ny charcharwynt neb kyn dostet yn llwrw carchar a mi, na charchar Llud Llaw Ereint, neu garchar Greit mab Eri.'
...Ymchoelut ohonunt wy odyo, a dyuot hyt lle yd oed Arthur. Dywedut ohonunt y lle yd oed Mabon uab Modron yg karchar. Gwyssyaw a oruc Arthur milwyr yr Ynys honn, a mynet hyt yg Kaer Loyw y lle yd oed Mabon yg karchar. Mynet a oruc Kei a Bedwyr ar dwy yscwyd y ppsc. tra yttoed vilwyr arthur yn ymlad a'r gaer, rwygaw o Gei y uagwyr a chymryt y carcharawr ar y geuyn, ac ymlad a'r gwyr ual kynt. Atref y doeth Arthur a Mabon gantaw yn ryd.²⁴¹

²³⁹Hughes, *Math*, p. 9, also see note on p. 69.

²⁴⁰In Irish tradition, Fionn Mac Cumhaill also obtained wisdom by a similar means. While helping a druid cook the salmon of wisdom, Fionn burnt his thumb and sucked on it to ease the pain, which gave him the wisdom meant for the druid (who was much more sanguine about this than Ceridwen). From then on, when he needed to think hard about something, Fionn put his thumb in his mouth. The baby Taliesin is eventually found in a salmon weir, another parallel. See John T. Koch and John Carey, *The Celtic Heroic Age* (Malden, MA 1994) p. 185.

²⁴¹Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 33. '...they travelled until they came to the other side of the wall from the prisoner, and they could hear lamenting and moaning on the other side of the wall from them. Gwrhryr said, "Who is lamenting in this house of stone?" "Alas, sir, he who is here has reason to lament. It is Mabon son of Modron who is imprisoned

Mabon's story, of being kidnapped as a baby, can be associated with the tale of Rhiannon and Pryderi in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, with which it shares obvious parallels.²⁴² In both cases a baby is stolen from his mother's side; Mabon after the religiously significant passage of three days, and Pryderi on the night of his birth. Modron and Rhiannon are both generally considered to have an earlier life representing fertility and sovereignty.²⁴³ Pryderi is not imprisoned but fostered by another noble family who find him in a stable; he is eventually returned to his parents and grows close to his mother. Whether Mabon is ever reunited with Modron we are never told; at least in *Culhwch* his development requires only acceptance into the masculine warrior society in place of a kin-group.

Jones notes several characteristics of the 'boys in boxes' episodes that appear across more than one episode in similar forms: a boy is discovered, uncovered and removed from a container and adopted by an older, childless man.²⁴⁴ The scene is accompanied by lamenting or crying: Lleu cries out himself, Elffin is distracted from his own wailing by the appearance of the coracle, and Mabon can be heard sobbing through the walls of his prison. Goreu is silent, himself, but his mother has been loud enough for both of them. A significant amount of time will have passed between the child's actual birth and his secondary one, and he may have been separated from his mother, whether by abandonment or kidnapping. In this, Goreu does not completely fit the pattern, as his mother is responsible for his concealment, but her actions are motivated by the fear of just such a

here, and no one has been so painfully incarcerated in a prison as I, neither the prison of Lludd Llaw Eirant nor the prison of Graid son of Eri. ...They reported where Mabon son of Modron was in prison. Arthur summoned the warriors of this Island and went to Caerloyw where Mabon was in prison. Cai and Bedwyr went on the shoulders of the fish. While Arthur's warriors were attacking the fort, Cai tore through the wall and took the prisoner on his back, and fought the men as before. Arthur came home and Mabon with him, a free man.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 205.

242Once Mabon has been freed, he too joins Arthur's warband and is instrumental in the hunt for the Twrch Trwyth.

Welsh tradition makes him a hunter, and early associations between him and Apollo suggest this may have been one of his original functions. See Heichelheim, F. M., and J. E. Housman. 'Succellus and Nantosuelta in mediaeval celtic Mythology.' *L'Antiquité Classique* 17 (1948): 305-316. See the section on *Preiddeu Annwn* for a further discussion of Mabon in early welsh literature.

243Koch, J. *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (1500) See also W.J. Gruffydd, W.J. *Y Mabinogi: Rhiannon* (Cardiff 1953), 104 as well as R. Hutton, 'Medieval Welsh literature and pre-Christian deities', (CMCS 61), Juliette Wood 'The concept of the goddess' (*The Concept of the Goddess*) and discussions in the methodology chapter of this study.

244In the case of Gwydion, he actually has several other children, but has not acted as the father-figure to any of them; one has gone into the sea and three others are being fostered by his uncle.

loss. When he does emerge and becomes accepted into the masculine camaraderie of the band of warriors, she is willing to let him go. While Culhwch's stepmother, like Aranrhod of the Fourth Branch, attempts to keep a boy from achieving a state of full adult masculinity, Goreu's mother only wants him to survive long enough to reach it. Despite her size and presumed physical power, she is incapable of achieving anything real on her own; her maternal protectiveness has already proved useless against Ysbadadden's anger. This is part of a pattern in *Culhwch* of the impotence of wives and mothers, in which their wishes and best-laid plans are thwarted, ignored, or simply fail to materialise. Ultimately, the women of the tale have little control over either their own fates or their children's.

Jones finds a number of 'boxing episodes' with various degrees of association and draws a number of lines between them — just enough, really, to see something enticing beginning to take shape, only to be thwarted by lack of evidence and material. She suggests that the entire set of motifs belong to 'the mythology and ritual associated with the Brigantian version of a deity who was known as a Divine Son' and that the opening of the box itself to reveal the boy inside 'has some suggestive correspondences to the little that is known about the revelation of another divine boy in the Greek religious rite the Eleusian Mysteries'.²⁴⁵ However, there is another ancient episode involving a boy being revealed after being hidden in a basket that would have been unquestionably familiar to the medieval redactor but which Jones excludes: in the Biblical book of Exodus, when 'hi a gymerodd gawell iddo ef o lafrwyn, ac a ddwbiodd hwnnw â chlai ac â phyg'.²⁴⁶ Like the giant shepherdess, Moses' mother hides her child out of fear for his life; like the baby Taliesin he is drawn from the water. He too is adopted by a powerful man — the Pharaoh of Egypt — and like Goreu, eventually comes to avenge his wronged people. There has always been confusion amongst Biblical scholars about the meaning of the Hebrew word *tebah* (*T-B-H*), used in the most ancient versions of the Old Testament only for Noah's ark and Moses' basket; connections are drawn between Egyptian,

²⁴⁵Jones, 'Boys in boxes' p. 225.

²⁴⁶*Y Beibl*. Ed. William Morgan (1588), Exodus 2.3.

Greek and Latin words for chest, for coffin, for box.²⁴⁷ Moses' *cawell*, Taliesin's *crongwyl*, Pryderi's stable and Goreu's *coffr* are all vessels meant to protect boys from untimely death until they can grow up and become the heroes of their people. While it may be impossible to know how familiar the author of *Culhwch* was with ancient Celtic sources – it seems clear that he knew a considerable amount of traditional lore, whether or not he knew all the details of the stories behind it – it is surely safe to assume that he would have known the story of Moses.

Finally, there is the significance of naming as an indicator of status. Excepting Mabon, whose name is more of a descriptive title, none of these children receive the names they use as adults until after their secondary birth. Taliesin's first incarnation is Gwion Bach, and Pryderi is called Gwri Wallt Eurn by his foster-parents, but they leave these names behind when they take on their adult roles. Certainly many cultures worldwide have customs in which a name change marks the transition from childhood to adulthood.²⁴⁸ A mother alone, while necessary for actually giving birth to a man and providing him with a maternal lineage and blood links to other powerful men, is not sufficient for full participation in masculine society; this can be clearly seen within the corpus of early Welsh and Irish law.²⁴⁹ Lleu is actually given a name by his mother, if by accident, but Aranrhod is careful and determined to exploit what power over her son and brother she has. Rhiannon also names her son — and like Aranrhod is a formidable force in her own right — but in both these cases, they are not active in the naming, but rather, their offhand remarks are applied to their children by a man who gives it his seal of approval. 'Accidental' seems to be the expected method of naming these surprising children, as regardless of who gives the child the name; onomastic episodes appear to result from an unrelated uttered phrase describing a personal characteristic, as in the three examples here:

247Cohen, C. 'Hebrew TBH: proposed etymologies', *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society (JANES)* 4:1 (1972), 39-42.

248Alford, R.D. *Naming and Identity: A Cross-Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices* (New Haven CT 1988) p. 85. Also Carol A. Markstrom, 'Adolescent identity formation and rites of passage: The Navajo Kinaaldá ceremony for girls.' *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 13:4 (2003) 399-425, p. 417. See also the conversion of Saul in the New Testament, the enduring practice in the Catholic church of taking a saint's name upon confirmation, and the convention of women taking a husband's surname upon marriage.

249Charles-Edwards, Thomas. *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford 1993) p. 173ff *et passim*.

Ac ar hynny, llyma y dryw yn seuyll ar wwrđ y llog. Sef a wnaeth y mab, y uwrw a'y uedru y rwg giewyn y esgeir a'r ascwrn. Sef a wnaeth hitheu, chwerthin. 'Dioer,' heb hi, 'ys llaw gyffes y medrwys y lleu ef.' 'Te,' heb ynteu, 'aniolwch Duw it. Neur gauas ef enw. A da digawn yw y enw. Llew Llaw Gyffes yw bellach.'²⁵⁰

Ac yn gydrym ac i Elffin weled y taal, yvo a ddyuod val hyn: 'Wele dal Jesin!' Seef yw hynny, 'taalken kannaid.' ar y geiriau Jr atebodd yr edling o'r korwgyl, 'Taaliesin bid!'"²⁵¹

...a guas ieuanc a doeth gyt ac wynt y mywn – vn mab Custennhin heussawr. Sef a wnaeth ef a'e gedymdeithon a glyn wrthaw, mal nat oed vwy no dim ganthunt mynet dros y teir catlys a wnaethant hyt pan dyuant y mywn y gaer. Amkeudant y gedymdeithon wrth vab Custennhin, 'Goreu dyn yw.' O hynny allan y gelwit Goreu mab Custennhin.²⁵²

'Ac ny thebygaf uot neb o'r yniuer hwnn oll nit adnappo uot y mab yn uab y Pwyll,' heb y Teirnon. 'Nyt oes neb,' heb y pawb, 'ny bo diheu gantaw hynny.' 'Y rof i a Duw,' heb y Riannon, 'oed escor uym pryder im pei gwir hynny.' 'Arglwydes,' heb y Pendaran Dyuet, 'da yd enweist dy uab, Pryderi, a goreu y gueda arnaw Pryderi uab Pwyll Pen Annwn.'²⁵³

A name is the most basic signifier of personhood. Without one, a man or woman has 'no kinship, sex or identity', is isolated from the kin group and unable to depend on it for social, legal or economic support, those being the most basic and significant functions of the medieval Welsh family unit.²⁵⁴ He or she is forced to remain a child indefinitely, not fully developed either concretely or legally into a full member of family and society. Thomas Charles-Edwards has found that the initial status awarded to a newborn baby lasted until the child was baptised and named; this was a symbolic acceptance into the kin group as well as recognition of the parenthood and sex of the child, and only afterward was the new arrival awarded the legal status of 'child' rather than 'foetus'.²⁵⁵ Without this ritual of acceptance, he cannot legally be considered a person.

It is possible that a boy would then have been fostered out to a relative or other lord at about

250Hughes, *Math*, p. 12. 'And suddenly a wren lands on the deck of the ship. The boy aims at it and hits it in the leg, between the tendon and the bone. [Aranrhod] laughs. "God knows," she said, "it is with a skilful hand that the fair-haired one has hit it." "Indeed," [Gwydion] said. "And God's curse upon you. He has now got a name, and it's good enough. From now on he is Lleu Llaw Gyffes.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 56.

251Ford, *Ystoria Taliesin*, p. 69 'Then he took his knife and gave a cut on the skin, revealing the forehead of a human creature. And as soon as Elffin saw the forehead, he spoke like this: 'See the fair forehead!' That is, 'bright forehead.' And at those words, the child answered from the coracle, 'Taliesin it is!'

252Bromwich & Evans, *CO* p. 31. '...A young lad came inside with them — the only son of Custennin the shepherd. He and his companions...crossed three baileys, as though it were nothing to them, until they were inside the fort. His companions said of Custennin's son, 'He is the very best of men.' From then on he was called Goreu son of Custennin.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 202.

253Thomson, R.L. *Pwyll Pendewic Dyuet* (Dublin 1986) p. 22. "...I imagine there is no one in this entire company who does not recognise that the boy is Pwyll's son," said Teyrnnon. "No one doubts it," said everyone. "Between me and God," said Rhiannon, "what a relief from my anxiety if that were true." "My lady," said Pendaran Dyfed, "you have named your son well — Pryderi; Pryderi son of Pwyll Pen Annwn suits him best." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 20

254Charles-Edwards, *Kinship* p. 178.

255*ibid.* p. 175-6.

the age of seven, establishing ties with other households as he grew up, to take his place eventually in the *teulu* of a lord or petty king to whom he was related. There is some dispute over the extent to which Welsh children were fostered, as once again Irish tradition and legal writing have been projected onto medieval Wales, but Culhwch, like several other Welsh heroes, is explicitly stated as being 'placed with foster-parents' and literary examples clearly exist.²⁵⁶ While the Irish law codes lay out detailed guidelines for fosterage, from what skills the child was expected to be taught to the amount and variety of porridge he would be entitled to receive for meals, it is little mentioned in Wales. The Welsh laws state instead that a child's place is 'urth noe e tat, a'e tat en argluyd arnau' ('at his father's plate, with his father as lord over him') until the age of fourteen, and there are no mentions of the rights or responsibilities of foster parents.²⁵⁷ Christopher McAll, in his study of the life-cycle of noblewomen in *The Welsh Law of Women*, finds it unlikely daughters were fostered at all, and Llinos Beverly Smith's study of fosterage in late medieval and early modern Wales finds that the evidence in the high middle ages is 'overwhelmingly Irish'.²⁵⁸ Both Wendy Davies and Thomas Charles-Edwards find vastly more material evidencing Irish fosterage than Welsh.²⁵⁹ The argument for a tradition of Welsh fosterage generally rests on a passage by Gerald of Wales in the *Descriptio Kambriae*:

Another serious cause of dissension is the habit of the Welsh princes of entrusting the education of each of their sons to a different nobleman living in their territory. If the prince happens to die, each nobleman plots and plans to enforce the succession of his own foster-child and to make sure that he is preferred to the other brothers.²⁶⁰

Gerald goes on to say that foster brothers are closer than real brothers, which was considered common wisdom in much of early and medieval Europe and, considering the fratricidal feuds brought on by Wales' tradition of partible inheritance, may have seemed very much the case.²⁶¹ He

²⁵⁶Davies, *Mabinogion*, 179.

²⁵⁷*Llyfr Iorwerth*, ed. Aled Rhys William (Cardiff 1960) p. 98.

²⁵⁸Smith, Ll. B. 'Fosterage, adoption and God-parenthood: ritual and fictive kinship in medieval Wales', *Welsh History Review* 16 (1992), 1-35.

²⁵⁹Davies, Wendy. *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester 1982), 70-71; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford 1993), 78-82.

²⁶⁰Giraldus Cambrensis, *Journey Through Wales*, trans. Thorpe, p. 261.

²⁶¹Parkes, P. 'Fosterage, kinship and legend: when milk was thicker than blood', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46:3 (2004) p. 588.

also may have had a specific incident in his mind, one that he refers to elsewhere in his writing. At the death of Owain Gwynedd in 1170, his heir Hywel ap Owain was betrayed by stepmother and half-brothers and forced to flee to Ireland. When he returned at the head of a Hiberno-Norse army, he was surprised at Pentraeth by his brother Dafydd and killed. Hywel had been defended by the sons of his foster-father Cadifor, all seven of whom, according to their elegy, died at his side. Katharine Anderson notes that Hywel's mother was an Irishwoman, and it is likely that his foster-father was as well, though probably both resided in Wales.²⁶²

It may be, then, that Welsh sons were fostered only when an Irish strain of the family expected it, or if there was some other compelling reason to do so, such as the death of one or both of his parents. Special circumstances may serve to explain the clear examples of fostering in Welsh literature. In the Second Branch, Branwen and Matholwch's son Gwern is 'rodi...ar uaeth a wnaethpwynt ar yn lle goreu y wyr yn Iwerdon' ('put out to be fostered to the very best place for men in Ireland'); since he is the prince of Ireland, that his family would follow their customs is unsurprising.²⁶³ Fosterage also appears in the Fourth Branch, not only when Gwydion takes on the responsibility for the child Lleu, but in the three sons born to the brothers during their three years of punishment. Each time they return with a child, their uncle Math arranges to have fostered and baptised.²⁶⁴ In these cases, of course, the children remaining with their parents is extremely unlikely, as they were born of a compulsory union at the same time homosexual, incestuous and bestial. It is only by being removed from their parents to the care of their uncle and his men that the boys are able to overcome the stigma of their birth, alluded to in the text by the *englyn* recited by Math at the end of the punishment period:

Tri meib Giluaethwy enwir,
Tri chenryssedat kywir,
Bleidwn, Hydwn, Hychdwn Hir.²⁶⁵

262Anderson, K. 'Urth noe e tat: The question of fosterage in high medieval Wales.' *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 4:1 (2004) 1-11, p. 7.

263Thomson, Derick S. *Branwen Uerch Lyr* (Dublin 1986) p. 8. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 27

264Hughes, *Math*, p. 8.

265 Hughes, *Math*, p. 8. The three sons of wicked Gilfaethwy / Three true champions Bleiddwn, Hyddwn, Hychddwn Hir.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 54. Interesting here is that the *englyn* lists them only as the sons of 'wicked (or

Fosterage may well be brought about by necessity, but the literature suggests it was not unfamiliar. Pryderi in the First Branch is fostered by Teyrnnon, lord of Gwent Is Coed, and his wife, and although it was not a pre-arranged agreement between both sets of parents, the negotiation which take place after the fact imply that an understanding of the obligations of foster- and birth-parents, as well as foster sons, existed amongst the Welsh nobility. When the couple reach the conclusion that their adopted son is the missing prince and agree to return him to his parents, the wife lists the benefits to them for giving up a child they have adopted and come to love:

'A thri phet, arglwyd,' heb hi, 'a gaffwn o hynny: diolwch ac elwissen o ellwg Riannon o'r poen y mae yndaw, a diollwch gan Pwyll am ueithryn y mab a'e eturtyd idaw; a'r trydyd peth, os gwr mwyn uyd y mab, mabmaeth ynni uyd, a goreu a allo uyth a wna inni.'²⁶⁶

The last of these three seems to indicate an expectation upon men to support their foster-parents, which was the convention in Ireland; one reason the fosterage fee for girls was higher than that for boys may have been that girls would be less able to contribute to their carers upon adulthood.²⁶⁷ The conversation surrounding Pryderi and his return to his parents in the First Branch exhibit a clear tension about fosterage, however. When Teyrnnon realises whose son Pryderi is, the text tells us 'goueileint a dellis yndaw, o gamhet idaw attal y mab ganthaw, ac ef yn gwybot y uot yn uab y wr arall.'²⁶⁸ On one hand, because it was a kidnapping and not a true fosterage arrangement, this is to be expected; there is certainly a difference between raising another couple's child after being asked to, and raising him after finding him in a stable. When they do return Pryderi to his biological parents, the fosterage agreement appears to be carried out *ex post facto*, in a discussion between Teyrnnon and Pwyll, which reflects both a financial aspect as well as a genuine affection:

'Teirnon,' heb y Pwyll, 'Duw a dalo yt ueithrin y mab hwn hyt yr awr hon. A iawn yw idaw ynteu, or byd gwr mwyn, y dalu ytti.' 'Arglwyd,' heb y Teirnon, 'y wreic a'e magwys ef, nyt oes yn y byt dyn

unfaithful) Gilfaethwy', arguably the more passive partner, and not of Gwydion, who is arguably the more wicked of the two. See Hughes pp. lxiii-lxiv.

266Thomson, *Pwyll*, p. 21. "'And we will get three things, lord, as a result of that," she said: "thanks and gratitude for releasing Rhiannon from her punishment; and thanks from Pwyll for rearing the boy and restoring him; and thirdly, if the boy proves to be a considerate man, he will be our foster-son, and he will always do his best for us.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 19.

267Anderson, 'Fosterage', p. 2.

268Thomson, *Pwyll*, p. 21. 'grief seized him because of how wrong it was for him to keep the boy, when he knew he was another man's son.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.19.

uwy y galar no hi yn y ol. Iawn yw idaw coffau y mi ac y'r wreic honno a wnaethom yrdaw ef.' 'Y rof i a Duw,' heb y Pwyll, 'tra parhawyf i mi a'th kynhalyaf, a thi a'th kyuoeth, tra allwyf kynnhâl y meu uy hun. Os ynteu a uyd, iawnach yw idaw dy gynnhâl nogyt i mi. Ac os kynghor gennyti ti hynny...ni a'e rodwn ar uaeth at Pendaran Dyuet o hynn allan. A bydwch gedymeithon chwitheu a thatmaetheu idaw.'²⁶⁹

The assembled nobles — Pwyll's household and court — all agree on the arrangement, and it is carried out. The collective nature of familial arrangements is to be expected, and the expectation by extended family members to be involved in such matters is well-attested, as well as being the impetus for the action of much of the Second Branch, in which Efnisien's grievance is based on his not having been consulted on his half-sister's marriage. The *iarlles* in *Owein* likewise puts her fate in the hands of her council.

Pryderi was originally fostered out of necessity, because he was a foundling; likewise Culhwch may have been fostered away because of his mother's alleged madness and illness after his birth. In light of the arrangements for Pryderi's second fostering with Pendaran Dyfed, however, which has some appearance of returning to what would have been the original plan, Culhwch's absence from his father's court may be part of an ordinary arrangement.²⁷⁰ In any case, he is not at the court when his father remarries, his stepmother does not know at first that he exists, and his significant masculine relationships appear only later in the text and are with men outside his immediate nuclear family. Similarly Goreu, who has never left his parents' house, is accepted into the company of adult men immediately after his emergence from the coffer; Cai apparently thinks he has spent more than enough time being hidden away. His fosterage or adoption of the boy is marked by a statement of obligation toward him: 'Dalet gydymdeithas a mi, ac ny'n lladawr namyn

²⁶⁹Thomson, *Pwyll*, pp. 22-23. "'Teyrnon," said Pwyll, "God repay you for raising this boy until now. It is proper for him, if he proves to be a considerate man, to compensate you for it." "Lord," said Teyrnon, "as for the woman who raised him, there is no one in the world who is grieving for him more than her. It is right for him to remember what we did for him, for my sake and hers." "Between me and God," said Pwyll, "as long as I live I will maintain both you and your realm, as long as I am able to maintain my own. If he lives to maturity, it is more appropriate for him to maintain you than for me. And with your agreement...since you have raised him until now, we will give him to Pendaran Dyfed to foster from now on. But you shall all be his companions and his foster-fathers.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, pp. 20-21.

²⁷⁰Pendaran Dyfed himself only appears at the end of *Pwyll*. A reference in Triad 26 (Three Powerful Swineherds of the Island of Britain) also connect him with Pryderi and possibly also with the pigs of Annwn: 'Pryderi son of Pwyll, Lord of Annwfn, who guarded the swine of Pendaran Dyfed in Glyn Cuch in Emlyn'. Bromwich, Rachel. *TYP3* (Cardiff 2006) p. 50.

y gyd.²⁷¹ With this the arrangement is apparently complete. Cai, from then on, is responsible for Goreu, who then accompanies him even where their other companions are barred from entry.²⁷²

Another potential reason proposed by Anderson for the scattered instances of fosterage amongst Welsh princely families may, however, be most relevant to the situation of Culhwch himself. In a context in which familial violence between brothers and uncles was common, dynastic struggle a way of life, and conflict between lateral branches of the family tree was likely to result in more than a few dead sons, having a child raised away from the court in the house of a loyal vassal may have simply been a matter of safety.²⁷³ Hywel ab Owain's downfall is credited to his stepmother, Cristin ferch Goronwy, who may have orchestrated the uprising on behalf of her own sons — the place of a second wife was not a secure one, especially in a society where concubinage and illegitimate children were readily accepted.²⁷⁴ Fosterage would have provided a way to remove inconvenient half-siblings or the products of extramarital affairs from the immediate and threatening court, and this may have been the case for Culhwch. That his father neglected to tell his new wife about his son is perhaps telling, but this is a woman he stole violently from another man, and in the text never evidences any particular concern for her feelings. He consulted with a council of his noblemen, decided on her, and went about taking her with battle rather than courtship. Cilydd may have removed his son from court precisely in order to protect him from the animosity of his stepmother.

Culhwch's childhood features two prominent maternal characters: his actual mother, Goleuddydd, and his nameless stepmother, a local queen his father widowed and forcibly married. The first, Goleuddydd ferch Anlawdd Wledig, establishes in the first instance the nobility of her son

271Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 17. 'Let him be my companion, and neither of us will be killed unless we both are.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.192.

272Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 30. Goreu accompanies Cai and Bedwyr into the fortress of Wnrach Gawr when none of the other warriors are admitted.

273Anderson, 'Fosterage', p. 10.

274Furthermore in this case, Owein's marriage to his cousin Cristin had been declared illegitimate by the Archbishop of Canterbury, so her children's claims on any part of their father's estate were far from secure. Declaring heirs illegitimate remained a viable way of disinheriting them through the whole of the middle ages and, indeed, well past.

and his relationship to Arthur. There is a certain inconsistency in medieval Welsh tales regarding the tracing of lineages, and where one might expect a patronymic one sometimes finds the name of a mother instead, where the mother is of some special importance; Mabon ap Modron and Gwydion ap Dôn are both ready examples. Although John Layard suggests these matrilineal relationships reflect mythological elements 'in...contrast to the pronounced patrilinear...nature of its more superficial "historical" elements', tracing kinship ties through the mother's line has a legal historical precedent, and Morfydd Owen sees this not as a remnant of some prehistoric matriarchal society, but of woman as 'transmitter of liabilities and claims...on behalf of children'.²⁷⁵ In what Thomas Charles-Edwards terms 'status kinship', Welsh society emphasised a bilateral family identity stemming from both maternal and paternal lines.²⁷⁶ Types of kinship might be reckoned differently for different purposes — inheritance was figured differently from status, while a person's identity within his or her kin group might be different yet — but for a Welshman to be considered *bonheddig*, an innate nobleman, he must be able to claim noble descent on both sides. The Llyfr Cyfnerth redaction of the Welsh laws prohibits this status from those with '*lledach*', a one-sided pedigree — he need not be legitimate according to canon law, but he must be acknowledged by both sets of kinsmen and both must be of sufficient status. The Llyfr Iorwerth redaction uses the same definition, and then immediately separates it from the laws regarding inheritance, once again emphasising that the two categories are not legally equal.²⁷⁷

Charles-Edwards uses *Culhwch ac Olwen* as a case study exemplifying these definitions in literature as well as in law. The young hero is the son of Cilydd mab Cyleddon Wledig and of Goleuddydd ferch Anlawdd Wledig; on both sides he is the grandson of kings and this bilateral descent defines his identity. This bilateral nobility is necessary for his acceptance into the highest ranks of Arthur's court and Welsh aristocratic society. So strong is this inner nobility that it is

²⁷⁵Layard, John. *A Celtic Quest* (Ann Arbor, MI 1975) p. 3. Owen, Morfydd E. 'Shame and Reparation: Woman's Place in the Kin' *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. Dafydd Jenkins & Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff 1980) 40-68, p. 57

²⁷⁶Charles-Edwards, *Kinship*, p. 172.

²⁷⁷*ibid.* p. 173.

marked in his appearance, and when Glewlwyd tells Arthur that 'ny weleis i eirmoet dyn kymryt a'r hwnn yssyd yn drws y porth yr awr honn', it is assumed by all present that he must be a prince.²⁷⁸

In Culhwch's case, his dead mother's family are the most important. The avunculate relationship, the special significance of a perceived bond between a man and his sister's sons, is well-attested throughout Indo-European cultures. That it occupied a special place in Celtic culture is clear from the existence of vocabulary used to define it, especially in Old Irish, where no specific words exist for other female relatives outside the nuclear family.²⁷⁹ While there is no Old Irish term for 'granddaughter', and 'grandmother' is used but rarely, Charles-Edwards finds the single exception to be the correlative pair *amnair* (mother's brother) and *nai* (sister's son).²⁸⁰ While he and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh offer differing interpretations of the linguistic evidence regarding a potential Proto-Indo-European inheritance for the significance of the avunculate, it certainly seems clear that the status of the relationship predates the medieval period by a significant margin.²⁸¹ Tacitus, writing of the Germanic tribes, writes:

The sons of sisters are as highly honoured by their uncles as by their own fathers. Some tribes even consider the former tie the closer and more sacred of the two, and in demanding hostages prefer nephews to sons, thinking that this gives them a firmer grip on men's hearts and a wider hold on the family.²⁸²

The importance of the avunculate is widespread in primitive societies, even when descent and kin group membership is reckoned entirely through the patrilinear line. In the case of Culhwch, his defining and most important status is the collateral relationship through his mother's family with Arthur — his father's limited contribution is to send him to his maternal kin. Arthur, whose literary ubiquitousness requires he be related to nearly everybody, is 'at the centre of a cousinage consisting of the descendants of his mother's sisters': Culhwch, Goreu, Gwalchmai, Gereint, and St. Illtud.²⁸³

278Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 5. 'I never in my life saw a man as handsome as the one who is at the entrance to the gate this very moment.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 182.

279Charles-Edwards, *Kinship*, p. 36.

280*ibid.*

281Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás. 'The sister's son in early Irish literature'. *Peritia* 5 (1986) 128-160, p. 136.

282Tacitus, *Germania* 20:4; trans. in *The Agricola and the Germania* by H. Mattingly, revised by S.A. Hanford (Harmondsworth 1970), p. 133.

283Charles-Edwards, *Kinship*, p. 174.

This is, therefore, an important relationship to establish early in the text, and it is certainly possible that a medieval audience familiar with the legends surrounding Arthur could be expected recognise the name of Anlawdd Wledig, Goleuddydd's mother, as a traditional grandfather of Arthur. His mother — named Igerna by Geoffrey and adapted to Eigr by his Welsh translators — is, along with Culhwch's father Cilydd, one of the only characters outside Arthur's immediate circle whose name is reasonably well-known outside *Culhwch ac Olwen*, deriving not only from Geoffrey but, as per Evans and Bromwich, 'from the milieu of the Lives and Genealogies of the Welsh Saints'; her function here is to provide legitimacy for the hero of the tale.²⁸⁴

Goleuddydd has little agency of her own, and attempts to control anything in the world around her fail spectacularly, setting a pattern for the remainder of the text in which women's agency is consistently impeded. Like other Welsh heroines, her actions and her agency are expressed verbally and indirectly — her attempts to control her fate and that of her son are marked by the securing of oaths from her husband and chaplain rather than through her own action. Her virtue is mitigated by her descent into madness, and the text never explicitly directs the audience's sympathies. On the surface, her marriage with Cilydd appears to be at least superficially harmonious, but the darker hints within the text of her madness, mental instability, and worry for her son's future at the hands of his father all suggest that she is actually both insecure and unhappy. In a tale which opens with Cilydd's marital conquest of her, her own feelings and the relationship between husband and wife are no more addressed by the author than those of her successor. His criteria for choosing a wife are simple: she must be as highborn as himself, presumably with the attendant wealth expected of a daughter of a noble house. There is nothing romantic in the introduction of the tale at all, which seems to set the scene for a story which is, considering its premise as a boy-meets-girl comedy, entirely unsentimental. We are not even told that Goleuddydd is beautiful (though her name may imply it), or that she is kind, generous, a good conversationalist, or any other aspects normally expected of heroine-brides. The longed-for pregnancy, that dynastic

²⁸⁴Bromwich, Rachel & D. Simon Evans. *Culhwch and Olwen* (Cardiff 1992) pp. xxix-xxx.

imperative that defines her as both a medieval wife and a literary mother, drives her to into madness, and she flees from her home and refuses to 'dygredu anhed' ('go near any dwelling'), abandoning the traditional female sphere that would have been her place of safety and, albeit limited, control. All the female action in *Culhwch*, and indeed much of the action altogether, takes place in liminal areas, hovering at the borders of civilised spaces ruled over by their associated men. Women in medieval literature are at their most powerful when ruling their own homes, and that Goleuddydd flees hers to give birth in a pig-run marks both her madness and the decline of her own agency. Fiona Winward has observed of the Four Branches that 'from the evidence...it would seem that motherhood adversely affects standing and influence, since the independence of the mother is directly threatened by the child' and this is true of Goleuddydd as well as her counterparts.²⁸⁵ The evidence is not encouraging. Rhiannon's influence after the birth of her son is so diminished that her word is not even trusted over that of her serving-women, and it is only after a period of peaceful marriage and the birth of a son that Branwen is exiled to the kitchen and mistreated by her husband. The effect of a child on a woman's independence and influence is marked enough that Aranrhod refuses to acknowledge her children to members of her family who have just watched them born, and Goleuddydd would be perfectly justified in fearing that her own status at her husband's court will be compromised by the birth of her son.

Only the reality of impending labour brings her back to her senses, and she gives birth in a pig-run, without any assistance except for a swineherd. Even in her illness, she attempts to provide for her son after her own death by preventing her husband from remarrying. The promise of the two-headed briar is another aspect which seems like the stuff of romance or fairy tale, but there is nothing actually romantic in the exchange between husband and wife when they discuss it. Goleuddydd's concern is for her son, and her words suggest a genuine anxiety over his future as well as Cilydd's behaviour:

285Winward, Fiona. 'Some aspects of women in the Four Branches.' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 34 (1997) 77-106, p. 97.

Sef a oruc hi galw y chymar attei, ac ac amkawd hi vrthaw ef, 'Marw uydaſ i o'r cleuyt hwnn, a gwreic arall a uynny ditheu. A recdouyd ynt y gwraged weithon. Drwc yw iti hagen llygru dy uab. Sef y harchaf it na mynnych wreic hyt pan welych dryssien deu peinawc ar uym bed.'²⁸⁶

These are not the words of lovers saying farewell. In their practicality, they actually reflect the reality of medieval married life far more accurately than the courtly romances, and this unsentimental pragmatism remains a marked characteristic of Welsh literature even in those stories which attempt to adhere to the conventions of romantic genre. In the underlying conflict of the early part of *Culhwch*, the titular character is not actually particularly important, except as the catalyst for a competition between Cilydd's first and second wives.

That Cilydd will actually allow his firstborn son to be deprived of his inheritance is unlikely, despite Goleuddydd's fears. While he may not show particular care for the concerns of the women in his life, he is portrayed as indifferent rather than actively unpleasant. He may or may not care for his wife, but he is honourable in keeping the promise he makes to her. When his son asks for his help, he offers a solution. He presents a model of competent, paternalistic masculinity in which he appears capable of overcoming the challenges presented by his family unit.

Goleuddydd attempts to secure her son's future by ensuring the two-headed briar never grows, but this too ends in failure; not through her own actions, but rather by the inaction of a man she had entrusted with the task. Chandler argues that in *Culhwch* the men triumph at the expense of everyone and everything else, and that this incident serves as an example of the impotence of the women of the story to control their own lives.²⁸⁷ Neither Culhwch's mother or his stepmother are ultimately able to achieve their ends, the giantess loses most of her sons to Ysbaddaden, and the Black Witch is ultimately defeated. The only woman who can really be read as maintaining a degree of agency over her own fate is Olwen herself: a supernatural figure assimilated, in the story's conclusion, into the society of Arthur and his court, and whose motives, if indeed she has any,

²⁸⁶Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 1. 'She summoned her husband to her, and said to him, "I will die of this sickness, and you will want another wife. And nowadays it's the wives who dispense the gifts. But you would be wrong to harm your son. This is what I ask of you: not to seek another wife until you see a two-headed briar on my grave."' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 179.

²⁸⁷ Chandler, *Masculinity in Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 53.

remain opaque. Even Olwen's limited agency, as we shall see, is enacted primarily through a lack of resistance rather than purposeful action.

The woman who actually has the most profound effect on Culhwch's young life is his father's second wife. The text leaves her nameless, as her lineage is not necessary in establishing the bloodline of the hero; she is referred to only as the wife of first one king, then another. Like Goleuddydd her feelings are only barely, superficially explored, her identity built purely on her narrative function. The stepmother occupies one of the most conflicted places in literature, especially in the realm of folk narrative, a form from which the author of *Culhwch* can be seen to draw heavily. The enduring misogynist trope of the wicked stepmother has its roots in the Classical writers of ancient Greece, who 'used the term *noverca* (Greek μητρικά) to describe negative events or objects so frequently that it gave rise to a widespread certainty that stepmothers automatically harboured ill will towards their stepchildren.'²⁸⁸ The term was also used by the Greek writers and Roman surveyors to describe a location too dangerous for military operation as well as for immigrants, evoking a negative association in which female space is both threatening and unwelcome.²⁸⁹ Plato even went so far as to advocate a law prohibiting widowers with children from marrying again, so as to avoid introducing a stepmother — already presumed a damaging foreign element — into the family dynamic.²⁹⁰ That stepmothers are assumed to wish ill upon their stepchildren as far back as the Greeks is exemplified by the conclusion of the story of Medea — a foreign, barbarian woman whose desperate attempts to preserve her place and her family's in a hostile society lead her to the attempted murder of her stepson Theseus and ultimately her own exile.²⁹¹

Sarah Williams Clausen has found evidence of the prevalence of this attitude through Anglo-

288 Williams Clausen, Sarah. 'Stepmothers as villains: the dark side of medieval motherhood'. Paper given at Gregynog Medieval Colloquium, 2011.

289 Watson, Patricia A. *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality*. (Leiden, 1995) p. 4 (from Plato's *Menexenus*, 237b.7 and M.G. Mosci Sassi, *Il Sermo castrensis*).

290 '...and if a man's wife dies leaving female and male children, let there be a law, advisory but not compulsory, stipulating that he should rear the existing children and not introduce a stepmother.' Plato's *Leg.* 930b apud Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, p. 5.

291 Williams Clausen, 'Stepmothers'. From Herodotus, *Histories* VII.62i.

Norman England, citing the anonymous author of the *Gesta Stephani*, who refers to ‘...Bristol, the stepmother of all England’ when describing the city's position in the anarchic civil war between Stephen and Matilda.²⁹² Patricia Watson, in a survey of wicked-stepmother tropes from classical to late folktale sources, finds that such characters are most often attributed with a dynastic motivation; stepmothers who already have children of their own privilege the position of those children above those of their new husband — not an especially surprising conclusion to anyone familiar with either the fairy tale tradition or medieval dynastic conflict. Joanne McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, explaining the dilemma of a woman expected to provide for her children's future, note ‘the protecting mother was all too often found to be simultaneously acting the wicked stepmother’ as they attempted to secure the position of their own children against that of former and future wives.²⁹³ This certainly appears to apply in *Culhwch*. Considering that Celtic women continued to have strong ties to their birth families even after marriage, a conflict of loyalty is not at all surprising, and since medieval marriage was a business arrangement rather than a romantic partnership, it was not uncommon for married couples to have divided loyalties as they balanced relationships between varying family lines.

It is in this context that Culhwch's stepmother emerges as a sympathetic minor character, fearful for her own future as a once-widowed matron and that of her vulnerable young daughter. Despite the text's presentation of her as a bitter antagonist, her concerns are both understandable and likely justified. In the scene that leads up to her confrontation with her stepson, the new queen is walking alone near the house of a hag: like Goleuddydd, she has left the sanctuary of her home to traverse the boundaries of her society. Whether she was seeking the hag out or only escaping the confines of her new home is left unexplained, but the temporary self-exile to a liminal and ostensibly supernatural border area provides a sense that all is not right and well for King Doged's

292 ‘*ad totius Angliae nouercam, Bristoam*’. *Gesta Stephani* (ed/trans) K.R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 62-3.

293 McNamara Jo Ann and Suzanne Wemple, ‘The power of women through the family in medieval Europe, 500-1100’, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. ed. Mary Erler & Maryanne Kowalski. (Athens, GA & London, 1988) 83-101, p. 91.

widow and that she, like Goleuddydd before her, is markedly unhappy. Indeed, she admits as much when she appeals to the hag for some word of encouragement about her plight. It appears from the fragmented narrative left us that some of the story is missing in this encounter — not at all an unusual occurrence for *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where loose ends are left blithely untied at the conclusion of the narrative and plot points and characters vanish into thin air.

On one hand, it seems inconsistent that she should be so bothered by Cilydd's childlessness when it means, as the hag says, 'Darogan yw itaw kaffel ettiuet; ohonot ti yt gaffo ef kanys ry gaffo o arall' ('he may get an heir on you, as he hasn't on anyone else') and it seems would secure her position in the court.²⁹⁴ If the couple were to have a son together, in the absence of any prior male children, he would inherit all of Cilydd's property. The existence of Culhwch, an elder half-brother to compete for the inheritance, will only complicate the picture. The chief difficulty in this passage of the text, however, is that the hag is quite simply wrong: Cilydd has an heir, and no explanation is ever offered for why she says otherwise.²⁹⁵

The queen's conversation with Culhwch makes clear enough that she wants her own dynasty and her daughter's future secured, and her plan to marry the stepsiblings speaks to her desire to unify their family unit against future intruders. Welsh sons all shared in their father's property upon his death, but daughters did not — and certainly not stepdaughters — so to ensure her daughter a secure fortune and a share of her husband's property requires a marriage. The Church, however, certainly frowned on marriages between stepsiblings on consanguinity grounds. Even Wales, which had its own customs regarding marriage and inheritance and remained unconcerned with the Church's view on it till the thirteenth century when Llewelyn ap Iorwerth established a short-lived system of primogeniture would likely have considered a marriage between stepsiblings as incestuous.²⁹⁶ However, R. R. Davies has argued that 'the Church's teaching on the prohibited

294 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 2. Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 180.

295 One possibility is that the old woman simply forgot about a boy who had been fostered away over ten years previous, and only remembers his existence in the middle of the conversation. The section of the text is puzzlingly unclear on the matter.

296 Beverley Smith, J. 'Dynastic succession in medieval Wales', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* xxxiii (1986) 199-232, *passim*. There are examples of proposed endogamous marriages in other medieval texts, however. For

degrees of consanguinity in marriage...stood little chance of practical application in a thinly-populated rural society...which often used marriage as an instrument of social concord between feuding kin-groups.²⁹⁷ In this context, a mother motivated both to save her child from an experience similar to her own and to inspire a gentler alliance between the families than had been formed is understandable.

It is also plausible that the queen simply doesn't want to bear children to a man she did not choose and does not appear to like, who abducted her and killed her husband, and in this case a stepson might be depended on to provide for her and her daughter should they outlive Cilydd himself. The narrative says only that Culhwch's father Cilydd marries 'gwreic Doget Urenhin' ('the wife of King Doged'), a sentence or two alluding to the assassination of the woman's husband and the forced marriage she was subjected to. This was not a terribly uncommon way of getting wives in the medieval period and certainly not before; both Celtic and Classical sources, historical and literary, are populated by warriors carrying off heiresses.²⁹⁸

What little agency she has manifests verbally, like Goleuddydd and the long tradition of Welsh heroines. It varies from story to story whether the powers inherent in female speech are actually magical, or merely exceptionally persuasive, a confusion which likely reflected actual masculine anxiety about the power of women's words on men's actions from Eve to Delilah and onward. The wives of kings were seen as especially dangerous, as through pillow-talk, sexual persuasion and with the leverage of legitimate children, they might be able to influence the decisions of the king and thereby the fate and direction of the kingdom.²⁹⁹

The queen's authority to fix a *tynged* on her stepson is dubious. Charles-Edwards discusses the ambiguity of kinship within medieval Welsh tales, calling it 'one of the favourite themes of

example, in the twelfth-century French *Roman d'Enéas*, the heroine's mother attempts to arrange such a marriage between Lavine and her kinsman Turnus. When Lavine expresses her desire to marry Enéas instead, her mother accuses him of being homosexual. See Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 76-77.

297Davies, R.R. 'Bchedd a moes y Cymru', *The Welsh History Review* 12:2 (1984) 155-179, p. 176.

298For further discussion in this work on kidnapping as a marriage method, see the section on *Gereint*.

299McNamara and Wemple, 'Power of women', pp. 93-94. An example in Welsh literature is the First Branch, in which Rhiannon, after being accused of infanticide, is prevented from speaking directly with her husband by the mediation of his councillors.

medieval Welsh storytellers.³⁰⁰ Certainly, a child's actual mother is assumed to have a certain amount of power over him, and Freudian-inspired anthropologists have discussed at length the adolescent rites of passage that mark a young man's escape from maternal influence. Aranrhod in the Fourth Branch uses both this power and the ambiguity surrounding it to attempt to prevent her son Lleu from achieving social manhood, making use of a power she never acknowledges in public that she has the right to.³⁰¹ Similarly, the queen is not Culhwch's mother, and he, presumably having been fostered away from his father's house, is already, if barely, on the cusp of young manhood when she meets him for the first time.

It cannot have been a comfortable meeting for either of them. Once again, Cilydd responds positively to a direct request for action: his wife enquires why he has kept his son hidden, and without explanation or apology, he agrees to cease doing so and have the boy sent for. If Culhwch meets his stepmother prior to their confrontation, the author leaves it out, so that it appears from the text that no sooner have they met than she has proposed to him on behalf of her daughter. Culhwch, out of his element and still a young boy, protests, 'Nyt oed y mi etwa wreica' ('I am not old enough to get married yet').³⁰² It is necessary at this point for the narrative that his stepmother behave somewhat irrationally here, and perhaps, as in the scene between queen and hag, some part is left out — rather than wait, having put the idea in his head that he should marry his stepsister, she takes his protest as a wholesale rejection and curses him with the words, 'Tyghaf tyghet it na lath[o] dy ystlys vrth wreic hyt pan geffych Olwen merch Yspadaden Penkawr.'³⁰³

Not only does her *tynged* have the intended effect, regardless of whether she has a right to inflict it, but it seems to mark a sudden and immediate sexual awakening for Culhwch: 'Lliuaw a oruc y mab, a mynet a oruc serch y uorwyn ym pob aelawt itaw kyn nys rywelhei eiroet.'³⁰⁴ This

300Charles-Edwards, *Kinship*, p. 179.

301*ibid.*

302Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 2.Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 180

303*ibid.* 'I swear a destiny on you, that your side shall never strike against a woman until you get Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Bencawr.'

304Bromwich and Evans, *CO* pp. 2-3.The boy blushed, and love for the maiden Olwen filled every limb in his body, although he had never seen her.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 180.

manifests itself physically, outwardly as well as internally by making him blush; notably it is this external physical sign that leads his father to notice something amiss.

In the early middle ages, lovesickness was considered a feminine disease but one most likely to affect males, in other words, it took perfectly good men and made them like women. It had been introduced to the early medical literature by Galen, and been considered a form of madness by the Greeks, and in these early days was said to affect men and women equally and physiologically. By the medieval period, however, a different view began to take hold; Isidore of Seville includes 'love beyond measure' as an aspect of *femina*.³⁰⁵ Constantine the African's *Viaticum* located the disease of lovesickness in the brain rather than the heart, suggesting that it affected primarily males – especially noblemen, whose lives were already softer and therefore more feminine. Lovesickness, therefore, presented a direct and serious threat to the masculinity of the sufferer, and a demonstration of renewed male potency was called for. Sexual intercourse was the recommended cure – ideally with the object of the victim's affections, but given the impossibility of consummation was often what caused the affliction in the first place, in the absence of this opportunity sex with any other female would do.³⁰⁶ This is clearly not a possibility for Culhwch, who is explicitly prohibited by the terms of the *tynged* from acting out his adolescent desires with anyone other than Olwen, but the transformation he goes through almost immediately is remarkable. Not only does he go from telling his stepmother he is too young to consider marriage, and likely women at all, to being overwhelmed with longing, but he abruptly moves from prepubescent boy to young man, a necessary step on his journey to adult manhood. His sexual awakening, then, is brought about by the (in this case damaging) influence of a woman – not in itself an uncommon occurrence, despite its magical nature, for Culhwch would not be the first or last adolescent male to wake up one day with a sudden, all-encompassing interest in a member the opposite sex. Even the idea of falling in

305Bullough, Vern L. 'On being male in the middle ages', *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994) 31-46, p. 38.

306Bullough, 'Being male', p. 38.

love with someone the lover has never met was far from unheard-of in medieval literature; rather *amor de lonh* was a staple of the early troubadour lyrics of the eleventh century.³⁰⁷ When this courtly convention is set within the adventurous, martial context of an early Welsh kingdom, however, the hero cannot sit idly by waiting for his heart to break, or for a glimpse of his love from a distance, over a fence or through a hole in a wall. Rather, he summons his family and friends, gets on a horse, and rides off to see the thing through. The curse may be meant to keep him from achieving his full adult masculinity, but its effects are straightforwardly dealt with, by achieving the first of what will be a long series of tasks to obtain the woman he has now been destined for. Chandler observes that it is Culhwch's father who first presents an answer to the problem — that, presenting a picture of 'an assertive man, comfortably in control', he does not seem fazed or even terribly bothered by the idea of his wife placing curses on his son, and that from this point on, the men of the tale have things well in hand.³⁰⁸

And what of the other title character? Olwen herself, despite being the object of the story as well as the hero's desire, has a negligible impact on Culhwch himself. She is a collection of metaphors and generic descriptions which the audience has learned to associate with beautiful maidens. These rhetorical conventions are well-entrenched in the literature of medieval Europe, derived from a late-Classical ideal of feminine beauty which remained standard for centuries and elements of which dominate western culture even today. Brewer notes that "'Milky" whiteness; the golden hair contrasting strikingly with the black eyebrows; the slightly swelling lips; these establish the type to which every lady conforms in all the medieval Latin and vernacular literature of Europe."³⁰⁹ Because of these conventional descriptors which the audience has come to associate with beautiful heroines, all delivered in a poetic metre different from the rest of the prose narration, then Olwen must be beautiful:

307Topsfield, L.T. *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge 1975) pp. 28 and 49-52.

308 Chandler, *Masculinity*, p. 52.

309Brewer, D.S. 'The ideal of feminine beauty in medieval literature, especially "Harley Lyrics", Chaucer, and some Elizabethans', *The Modern Language Review* 50:3 (1955) 257-269, p. 258. That Welsh texts allow for slightly more variation, at least in hair colour, will be addressed in the section on *Peredur*.

A'e dyuot hitheu a chamse sidan flamgoch amdanei, a gordtorch rudeur am y mynwyl y uorwyn, a mererit gwerthuawr yndi a rud gemmeu. Oed melynach y fenn no bledeu y banadyl. Oed gwynnach y chnawd no distrych y donn. Oed gvynnach y falueu a'e byssed no chanawon godrwyth o blith man grayan fynhawn fynhonus. Na golwc hebawc mut, na golwc gwalch trimut, nyd oed olwg tegach no'r eidi. No bronn alarch gwynn oed gwynnach y dwy uron. Oed kochach y deu rud no'r fion. Y sawl a'e gwelei kyflawn uydei o'e serch. Pedeir meillonen gwynnyon a dyuei yn y hol myn yd elhei.³¹⁰

The last lines are clearly a play on her name, translated as 'white track.' The 'yellow broom', as a common and brightly-coloured blossom, is used frequently as a metaphor for women's golden hair (and as a literal aspect in the case of Blodeuwedd in the Fourth Branch, whose golden tresses are made from it). But it is also not rare enough to imply more than a conventional beauty; it is so frequent an occurrence that the author of *Peredur* can use it to subvert convention by using it to describe his loathly lady's teeth. White skin is a traditionally feminine attribute and also symbolises purity; the metaphors used are all fairly conventional, although it is worth noting that in Welsh poetry, wave-imagery is also frequently used to demonstrate masculine attributes.³¹¹ Davies notes that according to the Welsh laws, 'a "mewed" hawk was more valuable after it had "moulted" and grown new plumage, whereas a "thrice-mewed" falcon was a bird in its prime'.³¹² In this context, the description of the heroine reads as much like an advertisement for a worthy animal as praise for a beautiful lady. In case it is not apparent enough that Olwen is a prize catch, the line declaring anyone who sees her will fall instantly in love is there to drive the point home.³¹³

Olwen exhibits some agency and cleverness, but it occurs primarily as lack of resistance and only within a close and carefully-defined space. She moves only from the castle to the shepherd's

310Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 18. '[she comes] with a robe of flame-red silk about her, and a torque of red gold about the maiden's neck, with precious pearls and red jewels. Yellower was her hair than the flowers of the broom. Whiter was her flesh than the foam of the wave. Whiter were her palms and her fingers than moist cotton grass amidst the fine gravel of a bubbling spring. Neither than eye of a mewed hawk, nor the eye of a thrice-mewed falcon – no eye was fairer than hers. Whiter were her breasts than the breast of a white swan, Redder were her cheeks than the reddest foxglove. Whoever saw her would be filled with love for her. Four white clovers would spring up behind her wherever she went....' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 195.

311Lewis, Barry J. 'Golwg y beirdd canoloesol ar harddwch natur', *Dwned* 11 (2005), 35–63, pp. 36-7, and personal communication.

312Davies, *Mabinogion*, 268, from LHDd 83.

313Fortunately, this is an exaggeration, or Culhwch might have some trouble convincing his companions to carry on winning his bride for him, and not keep her themselves. The implication does, however, leave open an intriguing possibility: that the first twenty-three sons of Custennin, all of whom were killed by Ysbadden and who would have encountered Olwen early in their own adolescence, may have been her previous unlucky suitors. There is no explicit reference to the manner or reason for their deaths in the tale itself, but it certainly would add an element of pathos to the shepherdess' attempts to discourage Culhwch from seeking the same fate.

house, and that to bathe – a grooming ritual which would have required the assistance of a female servant or family member, of which it seems Custennin's wife may be the only one. Ysbaddaden does mention to Culhwch his wedding, once upon a time, to 'mam y uorwyn honno' ('the mother of that maiden'), but she does not appear to be present now, nor is Olwen mentioned in the text as having any ladies in her household.³¹⁴ She moves, then, within a small confined area – her father's lands – and only out of necessity, at which point she remains within a strictly gendered space. She refuses to run away with Culhwch, and instead gives him advice on how to deal with her father in courting her, perhaps interested in determining for herself whether this young man is worthy of her attention, but also demonstrating a determination to play by the rules as they have been set. As Alwyn and Brynley Rees note of the heroines of wooing tales,

...in some cases she helps him to overcome the obstacles which her father places in the way of their marriage. Yet, her attitude toward her father is strangely ambivalent. She refuses to be abducted until his preposterous terms have been fully complied with, but she can then contemplate his death with the most unfilial indifference.³¹⁵

Olwen is not a rebellious or subversive figure, but rather an unresisting symbol of the inevitability of change: marriage, death, and conquest. She does not appear to fall in love with Culhwch, but neither does she reject him, instead remaining calm and pragmatic in the face of his adolescent passion. Had she preferred to see him fail, she could have warned her father that Arthur's men were coming, but instead she keeps silent and allows them to fight their way into the court unimpeded. While like other Welsh heroines she uses speech to effect control, by advising Culhwch, but she also uses silence. Olwen is aware that her marriage will mean the death of her father, but rather than attempting to either hasten or prevent this eventuality, she accepts that both the marriage of daughters and the death of fathers are natural parts of the life cycle. While not appearing to wish her father ill, she accepts his eventual fate, and does not let sentimental attachment to him – if it exists – prevent her from acting on a natural desire to eventually break away from his influence. It is never made clear by the author how old Olwen actually is. She appears to be young and beautiful,

³¹⁴Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 196.

³¹⁵Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 266.

but she is also supernatural, occupying a liminal and magical world. As she remains under the influence of her father indefinitely, so also can she remain a young maiden, unassaulted by the passage of mortal time. The text and the characters acknowledge there have been other suitors before Culhwch, all unsuccessful and all now dead; it is only because Culhwch is related to and supported by Arthur that he does not share their fate.

As this section has demonstrated, the characters of *Culhwch ac Olwen* exist as part of a complex and layered familial framework. Their identities and actions are predicated on and influenced by their lineage and place within the kin group, but also occur as the direct result of action by their relations and guardians, and their acceptance or rejection of their expected roles within this group. Culhwch, Goreu and Olwen each escape parental influence in a unique fashion, and so these descendants of giants and heroic men forge their place in the youngest generation of Arthur's court.

Beards, Barbering, and Monstrous Gender

Much has been made of the recurring themes of haircuts and barbering that occur throughout *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Since the main action of the tale begins with a haircut, closes with a shave, and involves an entire warband charged with running all over Britain collecting the tools with which to trim a giant's beard, it's no wonder the motif inspires interest. The term 'barbering' itself, with its linguistic link to *barbarian* and connotations of the late medieval barber-surgeons, was coined by Joan Radner, in place of the previously more common 'grooming motif'.³¹⁶ She points out that it maintains a certain amount of unity in an otherwise episodic tale, where the narrative's action is both opened and closed with a shave or a haircut. Sarah Sheehan developed this further in 2005, discussing barbering as related to a kind of monstrous masculinity attributed to the giants.³¹⁷

The treatment of monstrosity and facial hair is part of a system which inscribes markers of

316 Radner, Joan. 'Interpreting irony in medieval Celtic narrative: the case of *Culhwch ac Olwen*' CMCS 16 (1988) p. 41.

317 Also Sheehan, Sarah. 'Giants, boar-hunts and barbering: masculinity in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.' *Arthuriana* 15:3 (3-25).

not only masculinity, but humanity, upon the body itself. Medieval writers expressed a general consensus that a 'monstrous' body was one which exceeded human norms, leading Dana Oswald to suggest (against Gilmore and Campbell) that the visible, physical distinction of body between monster and man was more definitive than intent or possibility for salvation.³¹⁸ Mandeville, for instance, defined a monster as 'a þing difformed aȝen kynde bothe of man or of best or of ony þing elles', a creature defined by its physical opposition to the 'normal', expected human body.³¹⁹ This can obviously apply to giants, who appear to exist on a sliding scale of hybridity and humanity, but also, as Oswald demonstrates, to any creature whose physical appearance differs in a significant way from the expected norm: Amazon warriors, for instance, bearded women, or men with dogs' heads.³²⁰ Deviant behaviour – of eating, grooming, or transgression of gender roles – can, as she points out, emphasise or exaggerate monstrosity, but does not itself define it.³²¹ The monstrous identity, like the monster's body, is neither constant nor stable in its deviations: as Sarah Miller observes, 'written in the disordered and wily contours of its body are a range of social, religious, racial and sexual aberrations.'³²²

Giants in this and similar tales are marked out by their size, overspilling the boundaries of the mortal masculine body in a way that symbolises the absence of manly control that characterises Arthur himself. J.J. Cohen suggests, in his work on giants, that

The giant is a violently gendered body....The giant's hybrid flesh is, however, not reducible to some pure state of male identity. Because he incorporates so much of the sensuous physicality with which medieval writers characterized women, and because his body functions as a disavowed point of origin, the giant shares more with the feminine, and specifically with the maternal, than his excessively male form might suggest. An ontologically problematic relationship between gender and embodiment will characterize the medieval giant in all of his identity-giving appearances.³²³

Cohen, like Oswald, finds this hybridity a definitive aspect of the giant's Otherness, and although his focus is English giants – he stops quite short of providing analysis of their Welsh

318 Oswald, Dana. *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge 2010) p. 5.

319 Mandeville, John. *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. Paul Hamelius, 2 vols. (London 1919) p. 30.

320 Oswald, p. 6.

321 *ibid.*

322 Miller, Sarah. *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (New York and Abingdon 2010) p. 1.

323 Cohen, J.J. *Of Giants : Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*. (Minneapolis 1999) p. ix.

brethren – some of the same conflicts exist in defining the monstrous bodies of the giants found in *Culhwch*. At the same time, the gendered aspects are more strictly demarcated, with masculine and feminine functions seldom sharing space within a single physical form. There is a monstrous reproductive element possible in Welsh giants, which I will discuss further on, but more often they are fiercely, overwhelmingly, uncontrollably masculine creatures. This exaggerated masculinity can in fact serve to make the female giant even more terrifying, by attributing male strength and potency to her reproductive capacity.

Meanwhile facial hair, an obvious and visible masculine marker, serves a multi-purpose function as an indicator of kinship, maleness, and honourable humanity. I will discuss first the significance of barbering in a human context, and then return to its impact on the hybrid and unstable identity of the giants.

Arthur cutting his nephew's hair fits into a paradigm of kinship and responsibility, recognition of a familial bond for Arthur as well as an act of submission by Culhwch that acknowledges Arthur's authority over him. The trimming of hair and beards is attested throughout Europe, though not in Ireland; Wales, like the continent, inherited it from the customs of the Roman Empire. Two distinct rites emerge from the European evidence, which are close, though not perfectly aligned, with the scenes in *Culhwch*. The first is *capillatoria*, the first cutting of a young child's hair and, despite Culhwch's age, this is essentially what he requests from Arthur. The second, *barbaratoria*, is the first trimming of a young man's beard — perhaps more fitting for Culhwch, but not, apparently, what actually occurs.³²⁴

These rituals were generally performed by the boy's father, and it appears that the audience's expectation is of a paternal relationship on the part of barber and boy, whether such paternity is of a biological or symbolic nature. The scene in *Culhwch* echoes an episode in the *Historia Brittonum* of St Germanus' meeting with Vortigern, who had fathered a son by incest on his own daughter. When the saint met with him to condemn the act, Vortigern had his daughter put the child in Germanus's

324 Charles-Edwards, *Kinship*, p.180.

lap and claim the baby was actually his:

...St. Germanus, taking the child, said, 'I will be a father to you, my son; nor will I dismiss you till a razor, scissors, and comb, are given to me, and it is allowed you to give them to your carnal father.' The child obeyed St. Germanus, and, going to his father Vortigern, said to him, 'Thou art my father; shave and cut the hair of my head.' The king blushed, and was silent; and, without replying to the child, arose in great anger, and fled...³²⁵

Germanus seems willing to adopt the child, following a pattern established in the Bible; the presence of the razor may suggest that he would have performed the *barbatoria*, when the child was old enough, as well as *capillatoria*.³²⁶ Thus, when Arthur agrees to cut Culhwch's hair, it represents acknowledgement of their kinship ties as well as Arthur's assuming the responsibilities associated with raising his younger cousin — in this case, the obligation to see him successfully and productively married.

It also marks Culhwch's acceptance of Arthur's authority. Haircuts have been used to mark submission or dedication throughout history: as Patrick Sims-Williams notes, 'hair is the most dramatically adaptable aspect of human appearance and people have always used it to affirm their allegiance to particular groups.'³²⁷ A monk's tonsure upon entering the monastery was a sign of subservience to God over earthly vanities, and James Stewart describes how Julius Caesar required the Gauls to cut their hair in deference to him as their commander.³²⁸ The Roman officer Civilis is said to have grown his hair long and dyed it red to fit in with his compatriots when he joined the Gauls and Germans in rebellion. Gerald of Wales observes that the twelfth-century Welsh wear moustaches with shaved faces, where the Irish have long, flowing beards in contrast to the ancient Celts.³²⁹ In the early modern period, men could be arrested, or at the very least held under suspicion, for growing out their hair and beards as it could mark them as Irish sympathisers and traitors to the more clean-cut, well-trimmed English.³³⁰

This is a late example but a long-lived one of the prominence of the beard as the preeminent

325 Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, ed. John Morris. *British History and the Welsh Annals* (London 1980) p. 29.

326 Charles-Edwards, *Kinship* p. 181.

327 Sims-Williams, P. 'Celtic civilization: continuity or coincidence?' *CMCS* 64 (2012) 1-45, p. 10.

328 Corson, Richard. *Fashions in Hair — The First Five Thousand Years* (London 1965) p. 95.

329 Sims-Williams, 'Continuity or coincidence', p. 10

330 Corson, *Fashions in Hair*, p. 95

sign of adult Celtic masculinity. There is an obvious basis for this. Sheehan points out that 'in medieval Celtic literature, beards — aside from the whiskers of loathly ladies — are the preserve of male characters', but this is, of course, not only a literary phenomenon but a biological one as well. Facial hair is a fairly unambiguous marker of adult manhood, simply because it is only adult men who are likely to have it.³³¹ It also seems to have been an important enough aspect of manhood to have been codified into law. One of the very few legally legitimate reasons for a medieval Welshman to strike his wife was if she wished shame on his beard, and to do so was listed a punishable offence in both the *Llyfr Damweiniau* and the Iorwerth redaction of *Cyfraith Hywel*.³³² The oath 'meuyl ar uy maryf' appears in each of *Branwen*, *Peredur* and *Owein*, and the *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* suggests that 'baryf', in this context, should be understood to mean 'manhood'.³³³ A beard is a 'definitely masculine, yet completely vulnerable' body part, according to Sheehan, which makes it an easy stand-in for other body parts less susceptible — one hopes — to being chopped off.³³⁴ The laws list explicitly demarcated fines for shaving a man without his permission, which must, then, have been considered an insult far more severe than the accepted social norm. For such a thing to be codified into law during the long, evolving legal tradition of medieval Wales, it seems there must have been a certain number of prior incidents in which men ran about cutting one another's beards off. This is an act of emasculation, of violation and forced submission, and it is this that separates the tender haircut Arthur gives Culhwch and the violent, and in both cases fatal, attacks on the beards of Dillus Farfog and Ysbaddaden himself.

Sheehan suggests that the link between masculinity and barbering appears early in the text, when Culhwch is first cursed by his stepmother and the haircut by Arthur is offered as the solution

331 Sheehan, S. 'Giants, boar-hunts and barbering: masculinity in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.' *Arthuriana* 15:3 (3-25) n.pag. (Web version by Literature Online does not include page numbers.). There are, of course, some genetic haplogroups which tend toward female hirsutism, but I can think of no examples of a western culture in which bearded women were considered the norm.

332 Jenkins, Dafydd. *Hywel Dda: The Law* (Llandysul 1986)

333 'Manhood Lit. Beard!'. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (Cardiff: University of Wales 2015) <http://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html> [accessed 3 December 2015].

334 Sheehan, n. pag.

to his dilemma.³³⁵ She claims that the haircut scene should not be read as an acknowledgement of kinship because of its placement before Culhwch's self-identification as Arthur's cousin, but I hope I have demonstrated how both the text and the earlier tradition both seem to dispute this, and point to the haircut as the moment of revelation between close relatives. I do agree, however, that the scene marks Culhwch's transition to adult heterosexual manhood and his acceptance into the masculine environment of Arthur's warband. Prior to his journey, his resistance to marriage with his stepsister had been an argument of age, but while he claimed he was too young to take a wife, the *tynged* itself seems to awaken his sexual desires. Likewise, he is called *mab* in the early part of the text, and only after Arthur has allowed him into the hall do the characters refer to him as *unben*, 'chieftain', recognising him as one of their own.³³⁶ If the formula of a young man's coming-of-age narrative is youth, martial exploits, and then marriage, then the text can be seen to use a barbering episode to mark the end of each section of its protagonist's development.

To be well-groomed, beard or no, is also to be civilised. The conquest of the barbarian unknown is an easy enough allegory for the popular trope of shaving the beards of giants, but also for the extraordinary lengths the warriors are prepared to go to accomplish this. The encounter of Cai and Bedwyr with the giant Dillus Farfog, whose very epithet emphasises his beard, is claimed by Ysbaddaden to be impossible, because 'ny ellir mwynyant a hi onyt ac ef yn vyw y tynnir o'e varyf, a'e gnithaw a chyllellpennau. Ny at neb o'e vywynt gwneuthyr hynny idaw.'³³⁷ Naturally, the men do not take him alive, nor is there any indication that they ever expected or intended to. Cai and Bedwyr are not diplomats, and except for the marriage negotiation itself, none of the action in *Culhwch ac Olwen* is resolved by talking things out. The dichotomy so often present in medieval Welsh literature between masculine action and feminine speech is presented here as almost entirely one-sided, as it is only the male capacity for action which drives the entire narrative to its

³³⁵ *ibid.*

³³⁶ Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 6. 'Poet gwir Dyw, unben.'

³³⁷ Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 26. '[the hair] will be of no use unless it's taken from his beard while he's alive...and he will not allow anyone to do that to him while he's alive.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 199.

conclusion. These particular two seem to prefer deception, a predilection which no doubt aids in Cai's later metamorphosis by the French courtly writers into a belligerent bully, but *Culhwch* presents their actions without judgement. They trap Dillus in a hole, shave him, and then kill him. In another episode in the same text, Cai tricks the giant-king Wnach Gawr into handing over a sword, then uses it to murder him in his own hall. Despite the comedic overtones of the Dillus scene, in which the two heroes pluck out the hairs from their foe's chin one by one, the removal of the giant's beard is clearly a serious affair. That the scene prefigures the later climax of Ysbaddaden's fatal shave fits into the narrative structure of the tale, in which smaller tasks often seem to precede larger versions of the same basic theme: two sets of hounds, two huntsmen, two boar hunts and here, two shaved giants. The brutality of Cai and Bedwyr's dealings with Dillus Farfog certainly anticipates the final shaving, emasculation, and death of Ysbaddaden himself.

A Welsh legend tells of the giant Rhita Gawr, who made a mantle from the beards of all the warriors he killed.³³⁸ In this folktale the beards act as trophies the same way the early Celts would have kept their enemies' severed heads, as a symbol of the giant's warlike masculinity. He sends a message demanding Arthur's beard for his collection, which he says he will sew above all his other conquered beards in a place of honour. This dubious request is obviously refused, and Arthur is so offended that he marches off to Snowdon and the two fight. In some variants, Rhita is forced to shave off his own beard after defeat, clearly signalling complete surrender of his masculine primacy to a greater foe. A marginal gloss in the Peniarth 118 version says that Arthur and Rhita (here referred to as Itto Gawr) throw away their swords, 'to prove their strength. And at last by a struggle, and rolling, they came to the plain, to the place called Blaen Cynllwyd, after plucking each other's beards'.³³⁹ Here a clear division can be made between fighting with weapons in a dignified manner and a more primal, wild, potentially erotic masculine endeavour in which the two men roll around on the ground clawing at each other. The latter tactic seems to be exclusively attributed to fights

338 Grooms, Chris. *The Giants of Wales: Cewri Cymru* (Lampeter 1993) p. 214-15.

339 Owen, Hugh. (ed and trans) 'Peniarth Ms. 118, fos. 829-837'. *Y Cymmrodor*. vol. 27. London: Honorable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1917. pp.115-152; also Grooms, *Giants*, p. 303.

against primitive, supernatural foes. Beards, and the involuntary removal of them, is integral to both the action and motivation of the entire plot of this folktale, ostensibly an onomastic for the name Rhiw y Barfau.³⁴⁰ The story can also be compared to Arthur's encounter in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* with the Giant of Mont-St-Michel, a morally repulsive figure and apparently the literary descendant of Rhita, who also wears the beards of his conquered enemies as a cloak. The confrontation between Arthur and the giant includes not only the wrestling, but a literal castration:

The hott blode of þe hulke vnto þe hilde rynnez;
Ewyn into inmette the gyaunt he hyttez,
lust to the genitales, and jaggede þam in sondre.³⁴¹

There is surely no more explicit emasculation that a warrior can visit on an enemy than actually chopping off his genitals, which in this version — probably later than *Culhwch* by some three centuries, and mitigated by the influence of continental writers — can easily be read as a parallel of the Welsh giant's beard. If this in turn can be equated with the earlier head-trophies decorating the houses of ancient Celtic chieftains, then a clear link is formed between heads, beards, and genitals which can be seen to form the physical aspects of the warrior masculinity of the supernatural foe. In this case, the decapitation of Wrnach Gawr is relevant as well. Sheehan observes that the term used in the text when Cai is supposedly polishing the sword, '*daruu y wrteith*', refers to the sword being 'dressed' as well as 'furbished', similar to the wording used by Ysbaddaden discussing dressing his beard to ready it for shaving.³⁴² I do not think it necessary, as she suggests, to equate swords with beards, beyond acknowledging that both are fairly straightforward masculine signifiers which add to the overall maleness of the tale. Of the episode in the *Alliterative Morte*, Thomas Crofts has suggested that the castration is the end of the giant as a foe, and that the function of the wrestling scene shows that

340 Tracing the transmission of the Rhita tale is difficult due to the usual problems of manuscript survival. Grooms finds no mentions of the tale pre-dating Geoffrey's *Historia*, but Tatlock notes that 'No certainly earlier parallels to the tale have been found [but] the tale has the grotesque humour of the Welsh, and may well have been adopted by Geoffrey out of Welsh tradition.' John Strong Perry Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley 1950), p. 388-89.

341 Benson, L. and E. Foster. *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Kalamazoo 1994) TEAMS, Camelot Project. (<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/benson-and-foster-king-arthurs-death>) [accessed 22 July 2015] ll. 1120-23.

342 Sheehan, n. pag.

not only must you kill, but you must embrace, and be embraced by, the monster; there must be a phase of combat unmediated by weapons and armour...The king does kill the monster, not before becoming grotesquely interchangeable with him.³⁴³

His suggestion, then, is that Arthur surrenders some of his own civilised masculinity by dismembering the giant; in *Culhwch*, this can certainly be seen to occur. The text, however, does not seem to find it especially problematic. While in Augustinian terms, one must only be *animal rationale mortale* ('a rational and mortal being') to be considered human, a monstrous body is a cultural construction used in medieval narrative, to provide the audience with an easy way to tell who the heroes' enemies are. Arthur Marwick describes the centrality of 'the association between looks and character', arguing that based on Classical treatises on physiognomy, beauty was seen as a reflection of 'goodness and godliness'.³⁴⁴ There are few if any fair-faced villains in medieval stories, as outward appearance was considered God's way of indicating purity of heart and 'the testing of moral virtue may be literally written on the body'.³⁴⁵ The loathly lady alone subverts a paradigm in which knights fight monsters, evil kings are turned into boars, and God punishes wicked men by making them beasts. In *Culhwch*, the line between man and monster is blurred — while there are genuine monsters, there are also monstrous acts committed by men, some of whom have superhuman abilities themselves. Even the court of Arthur, populated as it is by men with bizarre varieties of supernatural powers, has not yet become completely mortal and civilised. Giants are found frequently in medieval Welsh tales and fulfil a similar function to the *sidhe* of Ireland, representing an uncivilised, frightening Otherworld, existing parallel to the mortal one and ready to be challenged. The word appears to indicate a supernatural origin as much as great size. While the majority of Welsh giants in folklore are indeed large and violent, a process of domestication appears to be ongoing. Giants live alongside mortal civilisations, in valleys and on mountaintops, occasionally marrying into the local population; not only Olwen but Branwen and Gwenhwyfar are

343 Crofts, T.H. 'Pervers and contrary deeds: the giant of Mont Saint Michel and the Alliterative Morte Arthure', *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*. eds. Amanda Hopkins, Cory James (Woodbridge 2007) 116-131, pp. 128-9.

344 Marwick, Arthur. *A History of Human Beauty* (Hambledon and London 2004) pp. 36-37.

345 Saunders, Corinne. 'The affective body: love, virtue and vision in English medieval literature', *The Body and the Arts*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude, and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke 2009) 87-102, p. 92.

brides from giant or supernatural families. The text of *Branwen* provides an explanation for their presence amongst the people of Britain, as Bendigeidfran explains to Matholwch of Llasar and his wife, 'Eu rannu ym pob lle yn y kyuoeth, ac y maent yn lluosauc, ac yn dyrchauael ym pob lle...'³⁴⁶ Grooms, following Sims-Williams, notes that 'this account introduces a race of giants...into the countryside, raising fortresses and breaching the unity of Britain.'³⁴⁷ They become the *gormesoedd* which native heroes must overcome, and provide onomastic tales for 'tumuli, standing stones, mountains [which] would people the landscape....'³⁴⁸ So prevalent are the giants of literature, and so intermingled with human society, that the eighteenth-century works of Lewis Morris amends 'cawr' in meaning from 'giant' to 'prince' or 'champion' to rationalise them into historical figures.³⁴⁹

The existence of giants was accepted by medieval scholars. St Augustine explores the idea (albeit from the perspective of a celibate fifth-century theologian) of whether giants were the product of unions between angels and mortal women. Were angels capable of physical contact when they were mostly spiritual creatures? Would holy angels of the Lord be so weak as to succumb to pleasures of the flesh, assuming such pleasures were even a thing they could participate in, and would it condemn them? He wrestles with these questions, but what he does not dwell on is whether giants actually exist — he may find puzzling the conflicting accounts of their origins but has no trouble accepting their presence:

A few years ago, in Rome, as the destruction of the city by the Goths was drawing night, was there not a woman, living with her father and mother, who stood so much taller in body than all the other inhabitants as to be indeed gigantic? A wondrous crowd rushed to see her wherever she went; and what amazed them most of all was the fact that neither of her parents was even as tall as the tallest men that we normally see.³⁵⁰

Medieval society was generally disposed to accept that the world was full of inexplicable marvels, and that just outside the borders of their own familiar territory could be lurking anything

346 Thomson, *Branwen*, p. 7. 'I dispersed them throughout the land, and they are numerous, and prosper everywhere....'

Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 27.

347 Grooms, *Giants*, p. xlv.

348 Sims-Williams, Patrick. 'Some functions of origin stories in early medieval Wales', *History and Heroic Tale*, Iorn Pio, Preben Meulengracht Sorensen, Aage Trommer, and Tore Nyberg, eds. (Odense 1985) 97-131, p. 101.

349 Grooms, *Giants*, p. liv.

350 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, XV.23, R.W. Dyson, ed. and trans. (Cambridge 1998) p. 682.

from fairy lovers to demons to dragons. That an individual might not have encountered such a thing himself was the work of divine providence and hardly constituted grounds for disbelief; in any case there would always be a distant relative, a well-travelled friend, or an itinerant poet whose experience could lend credence to the unexplainable. In the twelfth century, Pope Alexander III was sufficiently willing to believe the veracity of a letter from the mythical eastern emperor Prester John that he sent his physician off to the imaginary land with a reply.³⁵¹ The example of the Roman giantess with her human parents demonstrates the ease with which an early medieval audience might be prepared to allow for the mortal and supernatural to exist in the same family without explanation. Thus Olwen and Goreu are able to travel amongst the civilised and human folk of the court, whilst others – Custennin and his wife, Dillus Farfog, and Ysbaddaden himself – display the more explicit and monstrous properties of giants and exist outside the borders of the cultured, cultivated world.

The giants present an uncivilised, monstrous portrayal of gender, both masculine and feminine. However, while the monstrosity may be overwritten on the body, it reflects, perhaps more importantly, a monstrosity of spirit which resists adherence to accepted human social norms. It is therefore not only the excess of the monstrous body which defines a giant, but the lack of an inner humanity, which would be demonstrated by membership in the social group of the court and submission to Arthur's authority. The court list section offers a number of male characters exhibiting monstrous traits: Gwadyr Odeith ('Bonfire-sole') clears a path for his fellow warriors with his white-hot feet, while Uchdryt Varyf Draws ('Crossbeard') could throw his 'bristling red beard' across fifty rafters in the great hall.³⁵² Once again, the beard is equated with weapons and martial virility. Of Ysbaddaden himself, Sheehan suggests that 'the heroic feats which the heroes must perform to obtain the shaving items...suggest that Ysbaddaden's beard is special indeed, to be tamed and removed only through great peril.'³⁵³ If he is indeed the Chief of Giants, and his beard is equated

351 Silverberg, Robert, *The Realm of Prester John* (Athens, OH, 1996) pp. 58-60.

352 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, pp. 11-12.

353 Sheehan, n. pag.

with not only his monstrous masculinity but his very life force, then it comes as little surprise that victory over his beard is a perilous prospect indeed.

When these same monsters possess the power to reproduce, the anxiety they produce is heightened. A digression in the Second Branch tells of the giant Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his wife Cymidei Cymeinfoll, travelling in Ireland and carrying the Cauldron of Rebirth with them. The couple's monstrous children are born, fully armed, after only six weeks, and in another six are fully grown warriors. Patrick Ford draws a connection between the mother's name itself – noted by Sir Ifor Williams to be a compound of *cymaint* and *boll* – as 'simply a description of her capacity and function'.³⁵⁴ The family eventually make themselves unwanted, insulting and harassing people, until their presence so distresses the court that their hosts, unable to convince them to depart on their own, trap them in a room of iron and attempt to cook them all alive. Since the first year of the giants' visit was spent in relative peace, it appears to be only after they have bred a sizeable war-band that the humans feel threatened enough to forego the custom of hospitality in attempt to destroy them. When these two monstrous figures, the only survivors of the attack which apparently claimed the lives of their children, encounter Bendigeidfran – himself a giant – he solves the problem by dispersing them throughout his land in order to minimise their influence. Ford comments that the warrior function, as proposed by Dumézil and applied here to the giants, is always perceived as a threat, even when its purpose is benign.³⁵⁵ So also is childbirth itself. One of the commentators of *De secretris mulierum* ('On the Secrets of Women'), a pseudomedical text from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, wrote that '*mulier non est homo: sed monstrum in natura*' (women is not human, but monster, in nature).³⁵⁶ That human children are formed and gestated within the corrupt environment of the womb is suspect enough; when monstrous flesh

354 Ford, Patrick.K. 'Branwen: study of Celtic affinities' *Studia Celtica* 22 (1987) 35. 'Sir Ifor Williams (following Loth) noted...that her first name appears to be an extension of the ordinary noun *cymid* 'battle'. Her second name is a compound of *cymeint* and *boll* and would therefore meant something like 'equally' or 'so much' or 'distended.' The phrase that constitutes her full name, then, suggest something like 'pregnant' or 'bloated' with 'war' or 'warriors'."

355 *ibid.* p. 36.

356 Lemay, Helen. *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany 1992) p. 106.

begets and produces further monstrosity, the result must surely possess an abundance of female humour – hysteria and savagery unmitigated by appropriate masculine reason.

Even when the martial faction of a culture is human, it is full of people who by their very function must surrender some of their innate humanity. When this same faction is occupied by non-human, unstable creatures, that anxiety is intensified. Fearful of the consequences of living in such proximity to the potential for uncontrolled violence, the civilian inhabitants drive the monstrous to the edges of the world.

Arthur, however, like Bendigeidfran, appears to have managed or diluted the problem. This monstrous, supernatural Other inhabits all the edges of the lands under his dominion. Cohen observes that both Isidore and Augustine present giants as a part of the inhuman creatures appearing at the 'margins of the world', marking a boundary between monster and man.³⁵⁷ This is a wild place, populated not only by giants but magical boars, wondrous hounds and marvels enough that even the already-marvellous residents of the court are amazed by them. The journey of the king and his men around the countryside resembles the circuit ridden by nomadic medieval lords, bringing the places they visit increasingly under Arthur's control. This appears to be a transitional period for the landscape of literary Wales — the humans are not quite human, and in the outer edges one can still expect to find giants, witches, and magical creatures. Arthur's men in other texts still encounter mystical and supernatural elements, and the giants and their descendants appear in the *gormes* episodes and myriad monstrous Oppressors. But in the *rhamantau*, even the giants are in the process of being subsumed into a political landscape influenced by Anglo-Norman encroachment. Siôn Dafydd Rhys, following Geoffrey of Monmouth, says of giants around Aberystwyth that 'these giants were living in Wales before Brutus came to this island, and their custom while they lived was to kill whatever men should come to lodge within their strongholds,' indicating a traditional prehistory similar to that of Ireland, in which the early inhabitants of the land are supernatural,

³⁵⁷ Cohen, *Giants*, p. xiv.

violent, and uncivilised'.³⁵⁸ These creatures represent not necessarily a deliberate evil, but a primitive and anxious savagery, and Grooms observes that 'the attested pattern in the primary native lore concerning the disposition of giants doesn't assume their mythical origins from a completely negative world'.³⁵⁹ Certainly, as Kristen Lee Over observes, 'wickedness as such is never attributed to the giants and witches destroyed' over the course of *Culhwch ac Olwen*'s ambivalently violent narrative.³⁶⁰

The world of *Culhwch*, however, is contained, primitive, and British, and so it is not entirely surprising when the list of giants in the story proves to be extensive. Not all of these monstrous figures are enemies or even outsiders — as I have shown, several are even companions of Arthur and active members of his court. The most prominent is Cai himself, Arthur's steward and trusted companion, who counts among his powers the ability to make himself 'as tall as the tallest tree'.³⁶¹ One of his other attributes is that of generating heat, also a masculine trait, and apparently a Celtic one, reminiscent as it is of the Irish hero Cú Chulainn, who is thrown into a vat of water after seeing the breasts of naked women, and whose body heat boils the water in the vat enough to burst it.³⁶² Within medieval medical theory, which considered maleness as dry and hot, an excess of heat could bring about particularly male disorders — and in some cases, facial hair. In the story of St Galla, Pope Gregory tells his readers that 'the young widow had a very passionate nature...and was told by her doctors that, if she did not marry again, she would grow a beard even though she was a woman. And that is what happened'.³⁶³

It is clearly this excess of passion, manifested as masculine heat, that Gregory assumes to cause the growth of facial hair. Galla is not the only female saint to grow a beard. St Wilgefortis and St Paula of Avila — also called Barbara the Bearded — also acquired uncharacteristic facial hair. In

358 Grooms, *Giants*, p. xli.

359 *ibid.* p. xlii.

360 Over, Kristen Lee. 'In God's image? ambiguous kingship in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.' *The Language of Gender, Power and Agency in Celtic Studies* (Dublin and Syracuse 2013) 75-87, p. 80.

361 Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 189. Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 14.

362 Gantz, *Irish Myths*, p. 146.

363 Gregory, *Dialogues*, in Jean Tibbetts Schulenberg. 'At what cost virginity?' *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca 500-1100* (Chicago 2001) p. 1.

both of these cases, the women were young virgins who prayed to become 'disfigured and ineligible for marriage' so as to avoid pursuit by earthly suitors.³⁶⁴ Ironically, such a clear masculine marker is considered a disfigurement in a woman, yet at the same time is only attainable by women who transcend the limits of their sex to achieve sainthood. In Cai, the combination of facial hair, violence, and self-generated heat serves to indicate what Sheehan calls his 'pre-eminent heroism and his intense masculinity'.³⁶⁵

Also amongst Arthur's warriors in *Culhwch* is the hunter Caw of Prydein, who appears in the court list with his daughter and nineteen sons and ultimately serves as Ysbaddaden's barber. Caw is portrayed as a pillaging giant in the *vita* of St. Cadog, described as 'horrible and immense' and well as a 'monstrous hero'.³⁶⁶ When the undead giant pleads for Cadog's aid in escaping eternal torment in Hell, the saint intervenes with the Divine on his behalf, and Caw becomes one of his enthusiastic supporters. Bromwich attributes Caw's monstrous size in the *vita* to the particular hagiographer's decision to derive the name from the word '*Cawr*' (giant) itself.³⁶⁷

Finally, there is Osla Gyllelluawr, who takes part in the hunt for the Twrch Trwyth and whom the text claims carries a knife so long that 'pan delhei Arthur a'e luoed y uron llifdwr, y keissit lle kyuyg ar y dwuyr, ac y dodit y gyllell yn y gwein ar draws y llifdwr – digawn o bont uydei y lu Teir Ynys Prydein a'e Their Rac Ynys ac eu hanreitheu'.³⁶⁸ Sheehan rightly observes that if we compare this to other works of Welsh literature, Osla's knife appears roughly the same size as Bendigeidfran, who has never fit in a house, makes a bridge of his own body for his army to walk on and is described as a mountain moving across the Irish sea. Bakhtin's notions of classical and grotesque bodies, the latter being 'that which protrudes beyond the confines of the body or leads

364 Schulenberg, 'Virginity', p. 152.

365 Sheehan, n. pag.

366 Barber, Richard. *Myths and Legends of the British Isles* (Woodbridge 1999) p. 376. Other sources seem to indicate a tradition in which Caw is the progenitor of a line of saints. See Bromwich, TYP3, pp. 302-03.

367 Bromwich, TYP3, p. 307.

368 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 10. '...when Arthur and his hosts came before a torrent, they would seek for a narrow place where they might pass the water, and would lay the sheathed dagger across the torrent, and it would form a bridge sufficient for the armies of the three Islands of Britain, and of the three islands adjacent, with their spoil.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 186.

into its depths' is confused here, in a world where men and giants intermarry, live and quest together, and ultimately serve the same king.³⁶⁹

Outside the court itself, the warriors encounter the shepherd Custennin and his wife. Unlike the physically malleable giants of Arthur's court, the shepherd and his wife are creatures of unmediated size and potential violence, capable of wreaking destruction without intending to:

Redec oheni yn eu herbyn o lywenyd. Goglyt a oruc Kei ym prenn o'r dwylaw mynwgyl udunt. Gossot o Gei eiras kyfrwg y dwylaw. Gwascu ohonei hitheu yr eiras hyt pan yttoed yn vden diednedic. Amkawd Kei, 'Ha wreic, pei mi ry wascut velly, ny oruydei ar arall uyth rodi serch im.'³⁷⁰

Since Cai is stated as having the ability to become a giant himself, to worry that her embrace will crush him suggests she must be formidable indeed. But significantly, the humour of the passage also marks her welcome of the protagonists into the supernatural world. That she is also another maternal aunt to both Arthur and Culhwch links them to this wilderness and also further blurs the line between mortal and giant. It does seem as though humanity, in this story, is still in the process of becoming fully human.

The text also shows those who are 'becoming' the opposite way — instead of monsters turning more and more into men, these are men who have been transformed into monsters. This includes two oxen, 'Nynhuaw a Pheibyaw, a rithwys Duw yn ychen am eu pechawd'.³⁷¹ The Twrch Trwyth was subject to a similar fate, as Arthur is told he used to be a prince who was changed into a boar by God because of his cruelty.³⁷² The symbol of the boar itself is often found as a metaphor for Celtic masculine heroics, and Arthur himself is referred to as the 'boar of Cornwall' in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*. Warriors are described as boars in the elegies of the *Beirdd y Tywysogion* and in *Y Gododdin*. There also is found the name Grugyn, similar to that of the Twrch

369 Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, eds. and trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press 1981) p. 80.

370 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 17. 'She ran joyfully to meet them. Cai snatched a log from the wood-pile, and she came to meet them to try and embrace them. Cai placed a stake between her hands. She squeezed the stake until it was a twisted branch. "Woman," said Cai, "had you squeezed me like that, it would be useless for anyone else ever to make love to me."' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 191.

371 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 22. 'Nyniaw and Peibiaw, whom God transformed into oxen for their sins.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 195. These were the sons of Erb, a sixth-century king of Archenfield and mentioned in the life of St Dubricius and Rhiygarch's Life of St David. See Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 124 and Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth 1979) p. 75, Elissa Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Woodbridge 1987) pp. 99-100.

372 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 38.

Trwyth's spokesman and deputy, Grugyn Gwrych Euraint, 'Grugyn Silver-bristle', leading Sheehan to propose that he may also have once been a giant.³⁷³ The link between boars and warriors, with animalistic attributes reflecting a primitive and barbaric masculinity lasts well into the medieval period – Johannes Hartlieb's 1461 image of Alexander the Great depicts him with both a beard, and boar's tusks growing from his cheeks.³⁷⁴

The Twrch Trwyth appears to have been known in the Welsh literary tradition from an early period, and that the story of the hunt for him likely existed independently before inclusion in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.³⁷⁵ The original form of the name, *trwyd*, remained in use at least into the fourteenth century and is cognate with Irish *triath*, meaning both 'boar' and 'king' and establishing the metaphorical links between the two concepts from an early date.³⁷⁶ Cognate references and the explanation in the text of *Culhwch* that while Arthur and his men are out hunting, the boar and his band have destroyed a fifth of Ireland, seem to suggest a shared tradition between Britain and Ireland.³⁷⁷

The Twrch Trwyth in *Culhwch* personifies and brings together a number of disparate thematic threads. As a former king himself, he provides a comparison point for Arthur; furthermore he embodies the literal representation of what is customarily a metaphorical form. That the goal of the hunt is to retrieve hair-cutting implements from his bristles provides still a further link between barbering and lordship: this former king, who is no longer even human, refuses to submit to the authority of another but has maintained his grip on the outward symbols of his previous position. If, as Elizabeth Grosz proposes, the tools of one's trade becomes incorporated into the self-image of the body, the Twrch Trwyth's refusal to surrender a comb and shears he has no further use for can be seen as a determination to maintain his own inner self-image.³⁷⁸ Kristen Lee Over suggests that

373 Sheehan, n. pag.

374 Oswald, *Monsters*, p. 1.

375 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 131.

376 Johnston, Dafydd. *Gwaith Iolo Goch* (Cardiff 1988) p. 6. Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. lxxviii.

377 Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 270. In one version of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, the Irish version of this boar, the Torc Triath, is owned by the goddess Brigit, and a reference parallels the shout Culhwch threatens the court with, as well as one of the curses of the tale of Lludd a Llefelys. See Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 112.

378 Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN 1994) p. 80.

'Twrch Trwyth seems to be a fallen double of Arthur, a king degenerated from his once-human form' – and that, at least overtly, the narrative places them in visible opposition in order to contrast the result of corruption with that of privileged divine favour.³⁷⁹ At the same time, she notes that the portrait of kingship and of Arthur in the text is more ambiguous and conflicted than its superficial structure suggests, and that the text 'does not consistently uphold clear-cut distinctions' between the favoured, human Arthur and the wicked, punished Twrch.³⁸⁰ I would also add that all of humanity, in Culhwch, is subject to the same ambiguity.³⁸¹ It is certainly no coincidence that the Twrch Trwyth is the literal manifestation of a popular metaphorical descriptor for the masculine warrior. What is more conflicted is that as his sins are never specified, it remains unclear precisely how he differs from the war-band which pursues him. Finally – and fittingly, for with this battle the story ends – the supremacy of the heroic, masculine overlordship of Arthur is demonstrated in the last battle with the Black Witch. The Twrch Trwyth and the Black Witch together represent the most monstrous aspects of both male and female, and having failed to defeat the first, victory over the second is even more vital.

If the implements of barbering are to be read as a symbol of masculinity to be taken by force from Dillus Farfog, the *Twrch Trwyth*, and eventually Ysbaddaden himself, then likewise, the blood of the Black Witch is as potently emblematic of feminine power – a power represented not by the salvific blood of a virgin martyr or a young queen, but a terrifying and monstrous creature whose unwilling contribution serves to heighten and assist the males' aims. Peggy McCracken suggests that in medieval texts, gendered cultural values are mapped onto blood as well as the bodies that spill them, that the values of men's blood – usually shed in battle – is dependent on the values associated with women's blood.³⁸² The difference is not within the blood itself, which can be

379 Over, 'In God's image', p. 76.

380 *ibid.* p. 79.

381 Most of this chapter was written prior to the publication of the book in which Over's chapter appears. That we have reached many of the same conclusions independently, may strengthen the arguments presented, but I cannot precisely be said to be following her.

382 McCracken, Peggy. *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia 2003) p. ix.

salvific, symbolic, or horrifying, but 'in the state of the body that sheds it.'³⁸³ Here, the defeat of the Black Witch – overcoming the physicality of a vicious feminine power – is the final step toward the completion of Culhwch's ascendancy into adult manhood.

The redactor of *Culhwch* is inconsistent in how much time and ink he devotes to playing out the battles, and this is one of the longest in the tale. Having reached the witch's cave, Arthur's men advise him not to fight her himself, but instead to send in his two servants, implying that a battle with an old woman is not a fitting demonstration of the warrior virility of a great king, but better left to a pair of squires who were defeated in the previous battle.³⁸⁴ The servants and the witch brawl, she proves stronger, and the defeated men flee the cave screaming. Arthur, angered at seeing his two servants almost killed, tries to rush in to deal with the matter himself. Again the men advise him to send someone else, telling him that to have a king fight a witch would be unseemly: 'Nyt dec ac nyt digrif genhym dy welet yn ymgribyaw a gwrach.'³⁸⁵ Two more servants are sent in and fare even worse, 'hyt nas gwypei Duw y vn ohonunt ell pedwar allu mynet o'r lle, namyn mal y dodet ell pedwar ar Lamrei kassec Arthur.'³⁸⁶ The Black Witch appears to be quite monstrous herself; she lives in a cave and attacks the first servant by pulling him to the ground by his hair. No fight with or between women is ever considered civilised and this is no exception; it is a screaming, biting, dirty mess. The inability of the first four men to triumph over this raw, dark feminine power only serves to highlight Arthur's achievement in doing so, and his status as not only a warrior and a man of action, but as the recognised leader of the group. Once again, he has struck down a part of the barbaric fringe of Britain and brought it under his control. But it is not in wrestling with the hag that Arthur kills her, rather, the text says that, 'Ac yn achub a oruc Arthur drws yr ogof, ac y ar y drws a uyrrei y wrach a Charnwennan y gyllell, a'e tharaw am y hanner yny uu yn deu gelwrn hi.'³⁸⁷

383 *ibid.* p. 2.

384 In fact they were killed, but have apparently recovered; the author of *Culhwch* is inconsistent on several points.

385 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 42. 'It is not proper and we do not like to see you wrestling with a hag.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 213.

386 *ibid.* '...so that God knows how any of the four could have left the place, had it not been for the way they were all put on Llamrei, Arthur's mare.'

387 *ibid.* '...then Arthur rushed to the entrance of the cave, and from the entrance he aimed at the hag with Carwennan, his knife, and struck her in the middle so that she was like two vats.'

It is surely not a coincidence that the single woman the group must fight is brought on by the need for her blood. The blood of battle is supposed to be men's blood; men bleed, as Peggy McCracken observes, to prove valour, avenge wrongs, and impose justice.³⁸⁸ But women's blood on the battlefield is not only a source of feminine mystery and masculine anxiety, but a subversion of that most holy masculine realm of war, a symbol of the inalienable procreative power maintained exclusively by women. Even in the twentieth century, Joanna Bourke describes bloodshed in battle as experienced not symbolically but intimately, and C.S. Lewis includes a scene in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which Father Christmas tells Susan, 'battles are ugly when women fight'.³⁸⁹ The fiction of war's beautiful romance is reserved exclusively for men.

Where the other opponents of Arthur and his band all have their defeat symbolised by the loss of a masculine attribute – a sword, a tusk, a beard – the Black Witch too loses a strongly gendered attribute that marks her out as female. As Sheehan notes, 'the heroes' final triumph is to bleed an old woman (*gwrach*) dry'.³⁹⁰ But her defeat also marks the final victory of Arthur's masculine, human kingship over the remainder of his realm. Only the *Twrch Trwyth*, a former prince as strong as Arthur himself, escapes. In fact, the *Twrch Trwyth* may be considered stronger, as the abandonment of both innate and external humanity has granted him the ability to ignore social norms in favour of absolute violence. Once again we find the notion that the greatest warriors are those who abandon something of themselves – those who embrace the monster.

Ultimately, *Culhwch ac Olwen* is a broken mirror – beautiful in its final form, but also reflecting smaller pieces of the author's eclectic and incomplete knowledge. Its portrayal of gender, and indeed the bulk of its characterisation, is primarily archetypal, with figures who fit into generic but colourful moulds to perform their narrative function without extraneous analysis on the part of either character or author. While some of the tension stems from the conflict between physical and

388 McCracken, *Curse*, p. 10.

389 Bourke, Joanna. *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London 1999) p. 2; Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Harmondsworth 1950) p. 100.

390 Sheehan, n. pag.

verbal action – and it is not only the women who attempt to make use of the power of words: Culhwch threatens to curse Arthur and his court if he is not allowed in the door, and Ysbaddaden's extensive list of tasks is meant to intimidate the heroes from attempting to accomplish them – there is never any real question about which is the superior force. Men are men, heroic and ultimately victorious, while giants, women and monsters are either prizes to be won, or challenges to be overcome.

Early Poems: Preiddeu Annwn and Pa gur yv y porthaur?

Pa gur yv y porthaur? and *Preiddeu Annwn* are amongst the earliest Arthurian poetry, along with *Gereint filius Erbin* and a small number of other poems and allusions in the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Book of Taliesin. These include the *Englynion y Beddau* – a collection of short stanzas which mention the graves of some of Arthur's men – and prophecy or dialogue poems involving Arthur or Myrddin. The dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle reflects the same tradition of the king that is found in the saints' lives, where his function is to play the part of an earthly lord in need of clerical guidance. A number of connections can be drawn between the allusions in *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn* and episodes or motifs in other Welsh and Irish texts. In particular, shared motifs can be found in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, but also coincide with aspects of *Peredur*, the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, the late medieval 'Thirteen Treasures of Britain', the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, and the Elegy on Cú Roí mac Dáiri, also in *Llyfr Taliesin*. Here are the first recorded appearances in Welsh of the nine supernatural women who serve as caretakers of a magical inheritance, of the cauldron used to measure a warrior's courage, and, it seems, of a cattle raid related to a native tradition of Otherworldly journeys. Images of nine supernatural women, of kingly valour, and the few heroic survivors have roots that may be traceable through the texts. Finally, the *Preiddeu Annwn* poet presents a competition between the masculine models of *clergie* and bard, asserting the latter's superiority in terms of knowledge as well as heroic endeavour. This chapter will discuss the presentation of the heroic model in the poems, trace the analogues of the hostage motif and connect the hostage Gweir in *Preiddeu Annwn* with Mabon, the prisoner discussed in the previous chapter. I will then consider the significance of the cauldron as representative of the sacrality of female fertility and the possible origins of the nine maidens; examine the implications of the brindled ox in relation to the gendered, sovereignty-granting function of cattle raid stories found in early Irish texts; and finally note the antagonistic relationship posited by the narrator between the competing masculine models of poets and monks. It is also a

rare occasion in which an anthropological interpretation involving sovereignty figures and remnants of ancient rituals may be rightly considered, following Bromwich's suggestion that 'these concepts, inherited from primitive mythology and handed down almost exclusively by oral tradition, gave to the storytellers in Celtic countries the immense repository of imaginative, colourful, and even fantastic story themes on which their reputation was based'.³⁹¹ The relatively short length and obscurity of the texts necessitate a comparatively short chapter, but the questions raised are crucial to understanding the 'horizon of expectations' of the medieval Welsh audience. The allusions and references in *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn* form the mental furniture of the listeners, poets, redactors, scribes and storytellers who participated in the formation and transmission of the Arthurian tradition in Wales. Sims-Williams suggests that *Pa gur*, 'like the lists in *Culhwch*...would remind an audience of half-forgotten stories and whet their appetites for new ones'.³⁹² It is therefore to our benefit to explore the place of those 'half-forgotten stories' within the Arthurian genres.

Pa gur appears in the thirteenth-century Black Book. This is the only surviving copy, and like the ninth-century Juvenius *englynion* its haunting imagery and evocative language provide only a glimpse into its sources. In a tone which swerves between light-hearted and haunting, this dialogue poem lists the great deeds of Arthur's warband. It consists of 46 lines of text (89 half-lines of poetry) which cut off abruptly mid-line. Jarman dates the poem to the late tenth or early eleventh century,³⁹³ while in *Arthur of the Welsh*, Patrick Sims-Williams suggests a possible date of around 1100 based on the overlap of material with *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the Life of St Cadog, and some of the Triads.³⁹⁴ It has been edited by Brynley Roberts in *Astudiaethau ar y Hengerdd* and translated, as Jarman says, 'tentatively, several times'.³⁹⁵ It lists the glorious deeds of members of Arthur's

391Bromwich, 'Celtic elements in Arthurian romance: a general survey', *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies presented to A.H. Diverres by colleagues, pupils and friends*, P.B. Grout, R.A. Lodge, C.E. Pickford and E.K.C. Varty, eds. (Woodbridge 1983) 41-55, p. 52.

392Sims-Williams, Patrick. 'The early Welsh Arthurian poems,' *Arthur of the Welsh*, Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts, eds. (Cardiff 1991) 33-72 p. 38.

393Jarman, A.O.H. 'Y darlun o Arthur.' *Llên Cymru* 15 (1984/1988) 3-17 p. 17.

394Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 39.

395Jarman, A.O.H. 'The Arthurian allusions in the Black Book of Carmarthen,' *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies presented to A.H. Diverres by colleagues, pupils and friends*, P.B. Grout, R.A. Lodge, C.E. Pickford and E.K.C. Varty, eds. (Woodbridge 1983) 99-112, p. 107. This is the same volume in which Bromwich's translation of the text can be found; see Rachel Bromwich, 'Celtic elements in Arthurian romance: a general survey,' LAMA pp.

warband but never in any great detail, nor does it reveal much about Arthur himself. Some elements appear in common between *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, and although contradictions within the texts indicate an unlikelihood that *Pa gur* could be considered a primary source for *Culhwch*'s author, he also seems to have been familiar enough with the common features of the tradition to build on it.³⁹⁶ Padel notes a feature shared between the Arthur of *Culhwch*, *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn*, that they 'appear as if free of normal responsibilities, living for their adventures; their opponents are supernatural creatures'.³⁹⁷

Preiddeu Annwn is cryptic, highly descriptive, and filled with allusions to stories which, based on their attestations in and similarities to other works, would also have been familiar to the contemporary audience. The poem tells of Arthur's journey to a glass fortress on a supernatural island, along with a number of his men, to accomplish one or more of three things – the text, being already fairly opaque, is unclear precisely how the elements all connect, but considering the affinity of the Welsh bards for triads and tripartite structures, it seems reasonable to suppose he intends all three of them. These elements with which Arthur is meant to leave the island are a hostage, a cauldron, and an ox. The last is not stated explicitly in the text as an objective, as the mention of the *ych brych* ('brindled ox') is vague and unspecific, but I argue there is sufficient reason for considering it part of the 'spoils' of the title. The poem has analogues in Irish mythology and other Welsh stories, and participations in a tradition of invasion narrative which strengthens the position of native kings. It survives in a single manuscript: the fourteenth-century *Llyfr Taliesin* (MSS Peniarth 2).³⁹⁸ Translated in part by Roger Loomis and later in its entirety by Marged Haycock, it has been the subject of a number of editions, translations and retellings.³⁹⁹ The poem is part of a

41-55. For Roberts's edition, see Brynley F. Roberts, 'Rhai o gerddi ymddiddan Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin', *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd* (Cardiff 1978) 296-309. Translations of *Pa gur* in this work are from Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' pp. 40-45 unless otherwise noted.

396 Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 38.

397 Padel, O. J. *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* 2nd ed. (Cardiff 2013) p. 22.

398 The name *Llyfr Taliesin* is post-medieval, and may have been first used by antiquarian Robert Vaughan in the late 17th century. It appeared in Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* in 1707. Its digitised pages can be accessed online at nlw.org. I use here the fourteenth-century date proposed by Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth 2000) p. 69.

399 Among these – while not an exhaustive list – are Bollard, 1984, Coe and Young, 1995, Haycock, 2007. Quotations and translations in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from the latter edition.

corpus attributed to the ancient bard Taliesin and dealing with what Haycock terms the poet's 'legendary' persona: 'a figure who claims to have been created at the world's beginning, not born of mortal father and mother, who has been in the company of the divine family of Dôn and has lived in many different forms', and whose fundamental biography would be familiar to the audience.⁴⁰⁰ The poems in this collection involve magical transformations, time travel, and esoteric knowledge; Taliesin travels with Arthur, with Math fab Mathonwy, Gwyn ap Nudd, and other characters from Welsh mythology and folklore as well as Alexander the Great and Lucifer.⁴⁰¹ This supernatural and legendary poet has been everywhere, done everything, and been everything, so it is hardly surprising that in the height of Arthur's medieval popularity these two legendary figures, the king and the bard, would have found themselves having literary adventures together.

Together, *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn* reflect a concept of gender that is inextricably bound up in supernatural forces. The model of masculinity presented is constructed in the heroic mould, but also raises questions of the underlying humanity of the warrior function itself: what happens when the non-martial aspects of a man are all that remain? Women as romantic partners are completely absent, placed instead in distant fortresses and magical islands as caretakers of rituals and magical objects. Constructed as Otherworld figures, they represent a challenge for men who are not quite mortal themselves to overcome or a symbol of the quests they must fulfil. Finally, they invoke notions of unreliable narrative, as both poems feature a first-person speaker who mediates the presentation of others' identities. In *Pa gur* the narrator is Arthur himself, giving an account of the deeds of his men to the recurring porter, Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr. In *Preiddeu Annwn* the speaker is Taliesin, the equally ubiquitous poet and prophet who gives his name to the collection of poems in the Book of Taliesin.

Pa gur begins with the question whence comes its title: 'What man is the gatekeeper?' The structure of the scene seems to be well-rooted within the Celtic tradition in both Ireland and

⁴⁰⁰Haycock, Marged. *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth 2007) p. 9.

⁴⁰¹Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 17.

Wales. The motif Linda Gowans refers to as 'enumeration prior to admission' is attested in multiple examples in both Irish and Welsh texts, from Lugh's attempt to enter Nuada's hall at Tara as a jack-of-all-trades in *Cath Maige Tuired* to Cai and Bedwyr's admission in *Culhwch* into the hall of Wrnach Gawr.⁴⁰² Gowans also notes the importance of the disclosure of names within the heroic genre (though often true of romance as well). Anonymity can be a method by which characters ignore their obligations, and warriors are frequently anonymous until exactly the right moment demanded by the narrative for their identity to be revealed. This can lead, alternately, to recognition, acceptance, or if revealed too late, death at the hand of a kinsman.⁴⁰³

In *Culhwch* and the *rhamantau*, Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr is Arthur's porter, but in this case the king's position appears to be reversed as he requests admittance for him and his men. Sims-Williams observes that the tone 'evokes...the wonderful, irresponsible atmosphere of the Arthurian past' while simultaneously suggesting an Arthur down on his luck and accompanied by only a few close friends.⁴⁰⁴ The style and repeated use of the imperfect tense belong to elegy, a reading strengthened by Arthur's statement that 'gueisson am buyint / oet guell ban uitint' ('I used to have servants; it was better when they were alive').⁴⁰⁵ Such a scene would not be out of place in a poem in which the visitors at the door are invisible, ethereal ghosts: 'pa imda genhid?' the porter might ask, of guests he cannot see.⁴⁰⁶

Pa gur also exhibits similarities to the heroic elegy poem *Y Gododdin*, although the contrast in the enemies the two warbands fight – one mortal, one supernatural – is crucial. The underlying ethical discourse is the glorification of the deeds of a certain small group of warriors. Cai, Bedwyr

402Gowans, Linda. *Cei and the Arthurian Legend* (Woodbridge 1988) p. 4. For the original episodes see Gray, Elizabeth A (trans) *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Dublin 1982) 39-41 and Bromwich and Evans, CO, p. 37.

403Gowans, *Cei*, p. 4.

404Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 39. If only a few survivors are now seeking sanctuary behind Glewlwyd's doors, it seems likely there are seven of them, the most common number in Welsh literature for survivors of heroic defeats. Notably, it is the number of Britons who return with Bendigeidfran in the Second Branch as well as the survivors of the journey to the Otherworld in *Preiddeu Annwn*. It is difficult to tell from the surviving lines which names belong to people who are actually present, and which are epithets, enemies, or contextual references.

405Jarman, A.O.H. 'Pa Ŵr Yw'r Porthor?' *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin: Gyda Rhagymadrodd Nodiadau Testunol a Geirfa* (Cardiff 1982) p. 67. Translated in Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 43. I have chosen to follow Sims-Williams's conventions in the orthography and spelling of the Middle Welsh title of the poem.

406I am grateful to Ian Hughes and Paul Russell for their comments and discussion on this theory.

and the others are portrayed as heroic men 'of the early type, with manners quite alien to the future world of knighthood, but fully compatible with the atmosphere of saga or epic poetry'.⁴⁰⁷ They laugh as they slaughter enemies by the dozen, sing, drink, and grapple with fantastical foes, with Arthur's steward and friend Cai, whose reputation deteriorates upon transition to romance, as the primary hero. Unlike the warriors of *Y Gododdin*, however, they are not strictly mortal themselves, and their elegies, if such they are, are boasts rather than remembrance. In the manner of the semi-divine, supernatural hero, they prove hard to kill. The text says of Cai that 'Ný bei duv ae digonhei, oet diheit aghev kei' ('unless it were God who accomplished it, the death of Cai were unattainable'), which removes him from the realms of mortal heroic chieftains and instead into the ranks of otherworldly Celtic heroes.⁴⁰⁸ Of course, not only Celtic heroes were killed in strange and limited ways; other examples include Achilles, Samson, Herakles, Siegfried and Macbeth.⁴⁰⁹ The line also has echoes in the Fourth Branch, when Lleu tells Blodeuwedd, 'ony'm llad i Duw hagen, nit hawd uy llad i' ('unless God slay me, it is not easy to slay me').⁴¹⁰ Lleu's death requires an unlikely combination of events in which he stands under a thatched outdoor awning, with one foot on a bathtub and one on a goat, at dusk, with a spear forged for a year only on Sundays while everyone but the smith is at Mass. This is a situation unlikely to occur spontaneously, and Hughes notes that 'there is no explanation as to how these conditions have been ordained' and that they are meant to be impossible to achieve.⁴¹¹ The bizarre conditions may reflect a Celtic predilection for the grotesque, but also speak to the inevitability of fate: even great warriors will fall when God deems their time is at an end.⁴¹² Lleu, Bendigeidfran, Cai and Cú Chulainn will all be defeated at a time decreed by higher forces, though death, in medieval Welsh stories, is not always either debilitating nor permanent. What happens to the warrior when death is taken out of the equation? Can martial men still find glory if they are only taking others' lives while not risking their own? Joanna Bourke

407Gowans, *Cei*, p. 5.

408Jarman, AOH. *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Cardiff 1982) p. 68. Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 43.

409Hughes, *Math*, p. 94.

410Hughes, *Math*, p. 16. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 60.

411Hughes, *Math*, p. 93.

412Gowans, *Cei*, pp. 6-7.

invokes a military chaplain in the trenches of the First World War, when she quotes, 'the soldier's business it to kill the enemy...he only tries to avoid *being* killed for the sake of being efficient'.⁴¹³ The willingness to sacrifice one's life for the cause of lord and *teulu* is at the heart of the heroic ethos; the warriors of *Y Gododdin* and the sons of Llywarch are celebrated not for victories, but for their courage in defeat. Marvels were associated with Arthur's legend from an early date, and such wondrous foes as dog-headed men, covens of witches, and Palug's Cat, who felled 'nine score warriors' for her food, require equally wonderful heroes. In *Pa gur*, as in *Culhwch*, we find an Arthur who is still at least partially rooted in folklore. But even marvellous heroism has its limits, as *Preiddeu Annwn* suggests the group have met their match.

The first section of *Preiddeu Annwn* includes a reference to 'karchar gweir yg kaer sidi' ('the prison of Gweir in Caer Sidi'), in which the 'kywirwas' ('loyal lad') is restrained by a heavy chain 'trwy ebostol Pwyll a Phryderi' ('through the story of Pwyll and Pryderi').⁴¹⁴ The two latter characters are well-known from the Four Branches, in which Pryderi is kidnapped by a monstrous hand from the side of his mother Rhiannon soon after his birth. In the Third Branch he is again taken prisoner by magical forces, and it is left to his friend and stepfather Manawydan to set him free.

Other than a mention of Gweir in one of the Triads and a few mentions in poetry, we lack the background to explain why he was being held prisoner there. The presence of a prisoner to rescue might seem to imply a more benevolent motivation for Arthur's quest to the Glass Fortress than merely invasion, although in a post-Roman Britain characterised by constant raids against neighbouring petty kingdoms, these two need not necessarily be unrelated. The Second Branch, with which *Preiddeu Annwn* has a number of story elements in common, also involves a supernatural invasion of Ireland as Bendigeidfran, the giant-king of Britain, marches across the sea to rescue his sister Branwen from her abusive husband

⁴¹³Bourke, Joanna. *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta 1999), p. 2.

⁴¹⁴Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 435.

Clear parallels exist between Arthur and Bendigeidfran, both supernatural and undefeatable overlords and protectors of the entirety of Britain. Triad 37 reports that Brân's head was buried under the Tower of London, facing out to sea, to protect it, and that Arthur later had the head dug up so that he would be the sole defender of his land – and then he, of course, was said to be waiting off the coast on the island of Afallon until he was needed again.⁴¹⁵ Brân's lingering echoes resonate throughout Arthurian literature both in Wales and on the continent, in the forms of Bron, of Peredur's uncle, and the Fisher King. Arthur, in many ways, appears as the inheritor of Bendigeidfran's legends.⁴¹⁶

But while Brân has a clear motive for rescuing his sister, a member of his kin group under his protection who has explicitly requested his aid, Arthur's connection with the rescued hostage is unclear. The clues are small and tantalisingly vague. He appears in Triad 52, 'Three Exalted Prisoners of the Island of Britain', along with Mabon ap Modron and Llŷr Lledyaith, both of whom are likely divine or semi-divine figures, and it is this character with whom he is usually identified.⁴¹⁷ The other two prisoners we know more about. Mabon ap Modron ('[divine] son of [divine] mother') is generally considered on thematic and linguistic grounds to be related to the Celtic god Maponos, whose cult flourished in northern Britain, and is associated with Apollo and with Christ.⁴¹⁸ The name occurs twice in the fragment of *Pa gur*, possibly referring to the same persona in both instances. Line 13 refers to 'Mabon am mydron' as 'guas uthir pen dragon', while line 23 names a 'mabon am melld' in conjunction with a battle of Tryfrwyd, one of Arthur's battles in the *Historia Brittonum*.⁴¹⁹ The inclusion of formerly mythological figures in the warband, which in *Pa gur*

⁴¹⁵Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 94-102.

⁴¹⁶Newstead, Helen. *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance* (New York 1939), *passim*. Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 292. See also Alfred Nutt, *Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail* (London, 1888) and John Rhys *The Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891) pp. 306ff.

⁴¹⁷Bromwich *TYP3*, p. 147. Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 439.

⁴¹⁸Bromwich, *TYP3* p. 425.

⁴¹⁹The obfuscated nature of *Pa gur* makes these lines complicated to parse. The first reference seems to suggest Mabon is a servant of Uther Pendragon, but *guas* is a word with a wide semantic range and can refer to a young man in a variety of situations. Even 'uthir pen dragon' does not necessarily refer to Arthur's father. Uther only becomes associated with Arthur in Welsh after the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and this could be a name, or an epithet for an awe-inspiring wardlord – perhaps even Arthur himself. The second reference may refer to the same Mabon, and may name his father, or may again mean 'lightning' in a more metaphorical sense. Ifor Williams also suggested a derivation in which 'melld' also referred to Mabon's mother. See Williams, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic*

features an exclusively early roster of characters, reflects the hybridity and slow rationalisation of these larger-than-life characters into developing literary genres. In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Arthur and his warband rescue Mabon, now a young man, from the prison where he had been held since infancy. The rescue is part of the conquest of wild, supernatural, savage places by Arthur and his men, as well as being part of a tradition which sets them up as rescuers of prisoners. In addition to Eiddoel fab Aer and Mabon in *Culhwch*, and ostensibly Gweir in *Preiddeu Annwn*. Padel draws attention to the dialogue between Arthur and the Eagle, also in the Black Book. Upon discovering that the eagle with whom he has been speaking is in fact the soul of his late nephew, Arthur asks if a way exists to win him back by force of arms, which 'probably reflects his men's speciality in rescuing prisoners'.⁴²⁰ He also notes that while 'the outcome [of *Preiddeu Annwn*] was so disastrous...it may have been a technical success if we assume that Gwair, one of the 'Three Exalted Prisoners' in a Triad along with Mabon, was indeed rescued'.⁴²¹

Llŷr (apparently cognate with the Irish figure Lir) likewise has a long, complex, and probably originally divine history. The ruling family of Dumnonia, onto whose tree Arthur was eventually grafted, claimed descent from him, demonstrated in the genealogies of Mostyn 117 and Peniarth 27 as well as *Bonedd y Saint*. He was interpolated into Geoffrey of Monmouth's king-list and appears to be a legendary ancestor similar to Beli Mawr; this is borne out further by Geoffrey of Monmouth's making him the eponymous founder of England (*Lloegr*) and the tales of the entirely supernatural children of Llŷr in the Four Branches – Brân, Branwen, and Manawydan.⁴²² Even later still, and through a long and circuitous route, he provides the inspiration for Shakespeare's King Lear.⁴²³

That the Triads link Gweir with two other characters whose kidnappings maintain some mythological trappings, as well as his presence in the Otherworld fortress, suggests the faded

Studies x (1939) p. 41.

420 Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 50.

421 *ibid.* p. 28.

422 Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 419..

423 McKillop, James. *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: OUP 1998) p. 301.

remnants of a lingering tradition, lost though it might be, of Gweir as another supernatural prisoner. The court list in *Culhwch*, a source of many historical, legendary, and mythical names pulled out of context, lists a number of uncles of Arthur all called Gweir. That they are also placed in the list near the 'sons of Llwh Llawwynnawc', a name which also appears in *Preiddeu Annwn*, possibly one of Arthur's heroes, may suggest some traditional connection between them.⁴²⁴ Another possible instance is a brief cameo appearance in *Peredur*: when the young hero meets three of Arthur's knights in the forest, one is called Gweir ap Gwystyl. 'Gwystl' means 'hostage' in Welsh, leading Bromwich to suggest the name may reflect a faded connection to the Gweir who was once held prisoner in *Caer Sidi*.⁴²⁵ In lines 3-4, the author of *Preiddeu Annwn* further associates him with Pryderi, a central character of the Four Branches, who, like Mabon, was stolen from his mother's side as a baby and, also like Mabon and Llŷr, appears to descend from a mythological source.

I have previously mentioned parallels to the story of Branwen, the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, called the daughter of the previously mentioned Llŷr and also imprisoned in Ireland. Like the prisoners of the Triad she is highborn and semi-divine, and her story may be seen to conflate the motifs of the rescued prisoner with a version of the calumniated wife tale type as well as the queen caught between two families, the traditional position of women found as major characters in medieval stories. Brân's invasion of Ireland, which he accomplishes by marching across the Irish sea and then by making a bridge from his own body for his men to cross, is justified and mitigated by the mistreatment of his sister – he is not raiding, but rescuing a member of his kin group whom he still has a duty to protect.

What, then, does this mean for Gweir? There is no evidence that he was previously connected by tradition to Arthur or part of his warband, but it is possible. Or he may have been a Persephone-like symbol, like Mabon and Pryderi, of an ancient tradition within a supernatural

424 Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 11. 'Lleog's flashing sword was thrust into it / and it was left behind in Lleminog's hand.' Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 436. Haycock notes that there is ambiguity in these phrases, as 'lleawc' can be interpreted as either a name or a nickname, or as an adjective meaning 'death-dealing'. Likewise 'lleminawc' ('leaping one') could be a personal name or an epithetic reference to Arthur. See *LPBT* pp. 443-44.

425 Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 374.

world that functions independently of the mortal one. Arthur's intrusion and capture of the spoils is a challenge, just as it would be if the raid were on a more mortal and land-locked neighbour, and his recovery of the prisoner a sign of his superiority over supernatural, as well as worldly, foes.

The Cauldron of Rebirth

Amongst the 'spoils' the warband means to take back from Annwn, and the most well-known, is the magical cauldron:

Yg kynneir, o'r peir pan leferit
O anadyl naw morwyn gochyneuit.
Neu peir Pen Annwfyn, pwy y vynut
gwrym am y oror a mererit?
ny beirw bwyd llwfyr ny ry tyghit.⁴²⁶

The cauldron is perhaps the most crucial element of *Preiddeu Annwn* insofar as understanding medieval Welsh attitudes toward a mythological construction of gender. The nine virginal caretakers kindling the flames echo a Vestal concept of community fertility, with the cauldron itself standing in as an artificial womb. The presence of the silent warriors on the walls of the glass fortress recall the resurrected Irish warriors in *Branwen*, but also questions raised in *Pargur* regarding the attributes of courage and ultimately humanity required for masculine heroism.

The closest analogue is the cauldron of Dyrnwch (or Diwrnach), one of the Thirteen Treasures of Britain as well as one of objects of the *anoethau* of *Culhwch ac Olwen* where the Otherworld destination is rationalised into Ireland.⁴²⁷ *Culhwch* is the single other example where Arthur is the protagonist of the quest, but the cauldron is certainly recognisable, as its description in the *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg* explains that it would never boil the food of a coward.⁴²⁸ While the Thirteen Treasures come from a much later manuscript of the fifteenth century, some of the items on it are familiar from earlier works and seem to have a long literary history.

The properties of the cauldron are an important aspect of our understanding of heroic Welsh

426'My first utterance was spoken concerning the cauldron / kindled by the breath of nine maidens.

427Sims-Williams, 'Early poems', p. 56.

428Bromwich, *TYP3*, pp. 258-9.

masculinity and the perception of warfare within a social group. The heroic masculine model of medieval Wales was based so significantly on martial courage that a cauldron in which only a brave man's food will cook can survive and remain recognisable over several centuries of literary endeavour. The cauldron provides a mechanism by which men can judge the courage of their companions, so that a cowardly man might be discovered and ejected from the warrior ranks early: 'ag yno y caid gwahan rhwng y dewr a'r llwrf' (and thus the brave could be distinguished from the cowardly).⁴²⁹ The tribes of early Britain and Ireland were in an almost constant state of low-level warfare against each other, to the extent that Ireland measures periods of history in terms of invasions, and a man who might be called upon to fight at any moment would want to be sure that his comrades were prepared to do the same. An intense level of camaraderie and trust was necessary within a *teulu*, and in no way was this better symbolised than with the sharing of food and drink. Mead, of course, is important as both symbol of loyalty and currency — it is no coincidence it is mentioned in the *awdlau* of *Y Gododdin* thirty-four times — and shared food is symbolic of a shared fate. Folklore abounds with versions of the Persephone myth, tales of visitors to fairyland who are trapped there after sampling its culinary delights.⁴³⁰ As I have already shown, the Welsh heroic masculine identity is a collective one. The victory and indeed the survival of the *teulu* requires full participation on behalf of all members; there can be no weak links, and no room for cowards at the heroes' table. It is only those men who have the potential, if not the experience, in exemplifying the heroic warrior model for whom sharing in the feast is even possible. 'Cowardice', however, is a mental and not a physical attribute, and this too is significant. The inability to be a warrior is not enough to disqualify a person from membership in the group provided that inability stems from external social or physical forces. A boy who is still too young, a man too old, a cleric who has taken a vow of peace, or a woman might still be able to partake in the food from the cauldron provided that they still contain the capacity for heroic violence should it be required of

⁴²⁹*ibid.*

⁴³⁰'Tabu: eating in fairyland' is C211.1 in the motif index. See Sith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (Copenhagen 1955) vol. 1 p. 505.

them. The heart must be willing, even if the flesh is weak.

An analogue to the cauldron also appears in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Here the coward-spotting aspects are not emphasised. Ysbaddaden needs it to provide food for all the guests at Culhwch and Olwen's wedding feast; rather than exclude the unfit from social ceremony, the wedding and its feast serve to strengthen the ties between the members of Arthur's warband as well as the supernatural inhabitants of Ysbaddaden's realm.

Once again, analogues can also be found in the Second Branch. The cauldron of *Branwen* is used not for boiling food, but for raising the dead — a suitable use, to be sure, for a magical device brought from the Otherworld. In this story it is given to Bendigeidfran by a giant who had been exiled with his family from Ireland, out of the locals' fear of their monstrous offspring. Ford connects the births of fully-grown, armed warriors from the giantess' womb with the regeneration function of the *pair dadeni*, from which also emerge armed adult warriors, ready to fight; both serve as monstrous and threatening births.⁴³¹ The cauldron is brought to Wales from Ireland but then returned as compensation to Matholwch for the mutilation of his horses. This proves disastrous for the Welsh when the Irish use it in the midst of battle to bring their dead soldiers back to life. This too is not unique, and the functions of rebirth and providing food appear to be connected as well. Sims-Williams observes,

cauldrons were obviously associated with sustenance, both in this world and the next. Their food restored warriors' physical well-being, and in early Ireland bathing in a vat of meat broth or clay was supposed to heal otherwise mortal wounds. It is hardly surprising, then, that storytellers imagined magical cauldrons with the power of restoring life itself.⁴³²

The resurrection function is also echoed in *Peredur*, when he visits the Sons of the King of Suffering. The men are killed every day by a monster, and upon their bodies being returned, the ladies of the court raise them to life by bathing them.⁴³³ The knights rise, ready to fight again and die the next day. While *Peredur* mediates the cycle of battle and death through the discourse of

431Ford, Patrick K. 'Branwen: Study of Celtic Affinities' *Studia Celtica* 22 (1987) 29-41, p. 36.

432Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford 2010), p. 234.

433Goetinck, Glenys. *Historia Peredur van Efwrc: Golygydd gyda Rhagymadrodd Nodiadau Testunol a Geirfa* (Cardiff 1976) p. 46.

romance, the strange and hopeless scene nevertheless recalls the futility of the heroic ethos and the reminder that ultimately, war will always result in death.

An important feature of the cauldron in *Branwen* is that the reanimated corpses can fight, but cannot speak. This suggests, certainly, that they have lost an integral aspect of their humanity, and also parallels the image in *Preiddeu Annwn* of the fortress guarded by mute men. Where Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr, both in *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, is a talkative fellow, there is no conversing with the porters of the glass fortress. While it is by no means certain that the men on the battlements of the glass fortress are fallen warriors who have been animated through the power of the cauldron, it is also a reading encouraged by intertextual analysis. It also seems eerily fitting that the guards of the Otherworld would be the mute, reanimated bodies of dead warriors. Like the giants of *Culhwch*, these are essentially monsters rather than men. While the line between them is thin in the early poetry, masculine endeavour cannot be automatic; a man who fights for his friends or his lord is human while a reanimated body that merely goes through the motions is not.

The cauldron of *Preiddeu Annwn* is 'o anadyl naw morwyn gochyneuit' ('kindled by the breath of nine maidens') its fire sparked by a coterie of supernatural women.⁴³⁴ Although the term 'morwyn' in Welsh literature does not always indicate a virgin, it seems likely to do so here, in light of parallels between the Vestal virgins of Rome and the priestesses and nuns of the order of Brigid. It is possible, though not necessary, that the silent guards of the glass fortress are related to the mute warriors of *Branwen*, or products of the cauldron's animative properties, as previously suggested by Sims-Williams.⁴³⁵

If this is the case, it presents a paradox. As real men are birthed of real women, here the breath of supernatural or divine women lends a type of life to the bodies of male warriors, who emerge from the clearly womb-like space of the cauldron. A father, while intrinsically necessary for children in terms of biology, is not required in theology or literature, and early writers demonstrate a

⁴³⁴Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 435.

⁴³⁵Sims-Williams, 'Early poems' p. 56.

willingness to duplicate the effects of the virgin birth – or the resurrection – of Christ in order to indicate children which would exist outside the conventional power structures. However, neither the mothers, nor the womb, nor the resultant 'children' in this case are fully human, but rather incomplete creatures capable of performing only the particular, limited functions of the warrior. Medieval literature, both in Wales and elsewhere, is populated with strange births and examples of men attempting to usurp the female reproductive capacity for themselves – Gwydion and Math in the Fourth Branch do this when they create Blodeuwedd from flowers, and the myriad 'boys in boxes' episodes discussed in the previous chapter appear to be an attempt to remove the mother from the equation. But the removal of the paternal is no more effective than its opposite; in fact it may be even less so. No conception has taken place, and the second 'birth' from fire and metal is not an effective substitute for the real thing; the maidens are unable to actually replicate the effects of childbirth. What this process does achieve, however, in this scenario, is to provide the maidens and their fortress with an army of male defenders whose needs are minimal; unlike men of flesh and blood they will not require the potential promise of marriage and heirs or of mead and treasure to serve their supernatural mistresses. Alternately, of course, the warriors may be Otherworldly themselves; Padel suggests that 'we must suppose that his opponents were the fairy-folk, the inhabitants of Annwn; and that Arthur overreached himself' in invading.⁴³⁶

Sims-Williams notes the significance of three times three as a typical number for otherworld women, and its roots seem to reach far back indeed.⁴³⁷ In addition to the maidens of Annwn, it is the number of Muses in Greek tradition and Morgen and her sisters in Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, a text which also places the women on a magical island fortress.⁴³⁸ The connotations, however, are not always benign, and the male warrior function is shown to come into conflict with this supernatural

⁴³⁶Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 28.

⁴³⁷Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 46.

⁴³⁸Diodorus Siculus claims there was also a tradition in Boeotia that there were three Muses rather than nine, but that 'the number nine has prevailed since it rests upon the authority of the most distinguished men, such as Homer and Hesiod and others like them.' (See Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.7.1–2, trans. C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA 1946, repr. 1973/4) p. 362). As we shall see, the number of Vestal virgins and Brigidian sisters is likewise variable.

feminine model. Cai in *Pa gur* is credited with killing nine witches 'on the uplands of Ystafngwn', and the Nine Witches of Gloucester in *Peredur*, who first train the hero, are fated to be defeated by him. The seventh-century Breton-Latin *Life of St Samson* includes an encounter with a wild woman in the woods who, with her eight sisters, also recalls the nine witches of *Pa gur* and *Peredur*.⁴³⁹ It seems certain that groups of nine magical or supernatural women were a common and recurring trope in heroic Celtic stories from an early date, and likely evolved from sacred guardians to terrifying sorceresses. The most meaningful parallel of these supernatural woman, however, in function if not necessarily in number, are the virgin priestesses of the Irish goddess Brigid – to whom is also attributed ownership of a magical cauldron ⁴⁴⁰ – and later the nuns of the order of her euhemerised counterpart.⁴⁴¹

The motif may have roots in the cult of Vesta, ancient even in Roman times. Plutarch and Livy trace the origins of the Vestal virgins to the reign of Numa Pompilius around 700 BC.⁴⁴² The Vestals were important and respected priestesses of Rome, whose continued duties and well-being were considered both sacred, and necessary for the prosperity of the state. Symmachus attributed a famine suffered by his city during the early years of the rise of Christianity in Rome to the diminished respect for the Vestals and their work:

The laws of our ancestors provided for the Vestal virgins and the ministers of the gods a moderate maintenance and just privileges. This gift was preserved inviolate till the time of the degenerate moneychangers, who diverted the maintenance of sacred chastity into a fund for the payment of base porters. A public famine ensued on this act, and a bad harvest disappointed the hopes of all the provinces... it was sacrilege which rendered the year barren, for it was necessary that all should lose that which they had denied to religion.⁴⁴³

The Vestals' earthly power was significant. Unlike most women of Rome they were free to enter contracts, buy and sell property, and vote.⁴⁴⁴ They had the authority to free or pardon prisoners

⁴³⁹Koch, John. 'Cai fab Cynyr', *The Celts: History, Life and Culture*, vol. 1 John Koch and Antone Minard, eds. (Santa Barbara 2012) p. 141.

⁴⁴⁰CG 145

⁴⁴¹Bray, Dorothy, 'Brigit (Saint)', *The Celts: History, Life and Culture*, vol. 1 John Koch and Antone Minard, eds. (Santa Barbara 2012) p. 129.

⁴⁴²Wildfang, Robin Lorsch. *Rome's Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome's Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire*. (Oxford 2006) p. 77.

⁴⁴³Ambrose of Milan. *The Letters of Ambrose*. Pearse, Roger, ed. The Tertullian Project. (Ipswich 2004) n. pag.

⁴⁴⁴Wildfang, pp. 64, 73.

— Suetonius credits them with saving the life of the young Julius Caesar — and their very bodies were sacrosanct; a man who injured a Vestal virgin was punished by death.⁴⁴⁵ Their characters were considered above corruption, meaning both that their testimony in legal proceedings was taken without the need for oath-swearing, and that they were entrusted with the keeping of important documents and objects.⁴⁴⁶ This aspect, of the virgin treasure-keepers, is echoed in the maidens of *Preiddeu Annwn* with their cauldron, but that is not the only parallel.

The Vestals were responsible for rituals and responsibilities which endure in literature for centuries. Their foremost duty consisted of tending the hearth-flame of their goddess, which was seen as absolutely necessary to preserve the safety and prosperity of Rome. They existed in a liminal space, their chastity in opposition to childbirth but also channeling a greater, community fertility. Takács notes that

Though they were 'between categories,' neither matrons nor priests, they dressed as married women, and for the entirety of their priestly tenure they were to remain in a virginal state. They preserved, as it were, rather than expressing or experiencing, their procreative potentiality, which was controlled by the Roman state. One of the main duties of the Vestals was the upkeep of the fire in the temple of Vesta. This fire symbolized procreation. The Vestals and the fire formed a controllable symbiotic whole of procreative potency.⁴⁴⁷

This is a powerful image. The symbolic combination of marriage and virginity – the two conflicting states that defined the status of early women – effected a hybridity which was important for the preservation of the community. Ariel Bybee has traced elements of the Vestal cult to the early Christian nuns, finding parallels which recall the syncretisation of Brigid.⁴⁴⁸ It is not unreasonable to suggest that the resonances of these images could find themselves displaced into the exotic Otherworld landscape of *Preiddeu Annwn*.

The Vestals were also responsible for gathering water from the *fons et lucus Camenarum* ('spring of the Camenae'), a sacred healing spring dedicated to a group of water-based fertility

445Suetonius, *Julius Caesar*, 1.2 J.C. Rolfe, ed. (Cambridge MA 1913) p. 83.

446Wildfang, pp. 67, 100.

447Takács, Sarolta A. *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religions* (Austin 2008), p. 80.

448Bybee, Ariel E. 'From Vestal virgin to bride of Christ: elements of a Roman cult in early Christian asceticism'. *Studia Antiqua* 1:1 (2001) 3-19.

goddesses.⁴⁴⁹ They also prepared the food used in rituals — both reasonably considered functions of a domestic, maternal divinity. Vesta's sacred fire was available for anyone who needed it to kindle a flame for their own household, and thus the virgin priestesses exemplified the function of woman as chief occupant and sovereign of the domestic sphere in an extreme fashion, the housekeepers of all of Rome. They kept the households of the city safe and functional, symbolically providing food to sustain the people, much as the cauldron-maidens of *Preiddeu Annwn* provide the spark for a sacred and important cooking-vessel.

Takács and others draw parallels between the Vestals and the Roman-Celtic *Matronae*, the local mother goddesses from whom Rhôs derived Modron ferch Afallach.⁴⁵⁰ However, a clear medieval Celtic parallel to the Vestals can be found in the shrine of St Brigid in Kildare. Brigid is often considered one of the clearest examples of the euhemerisation of Celtic goddesses into the Christian orthodoxy: an early divinity, a tripartite goddess with aspects devoted to smithing, poetry, and healing, she shares enough significant attributes with the saint that it is difficult to entertain the idea that they might not be related figures. However, no truly cohesive mythology for Brigid-the-goddess exists, and the process by which an ancient goddess becomes a saint, especially when syncretised with a real historical figure along the way, is too complex to draw clean lines from one to the other. Brigid the saint, whose story is documented in much more detail than her pagan counterpart, is associated with the Virgin Mary and may derive some of her attributes from her, rather than from any pre-Christian origin.⁴⁵¹ However, even Mary herself appears to have been shaped somewhat into the mould of ancient traditions, and Takács notes the evolution of the *Matronae* into Gaul.⁴⁵² In the early 1980s, a study of mother-goddess worship described Brigid as an earth goddess 'remoulded, like the Virgin Mary, into a patriarchal vision for the repression of women and the destruction of women's power and creativity, leaving them only as childbearers for

449Takács, p. 30.

450Takács, p. 118f.

451'Brigit (Saint)', p. 129.

452Takács p. 121.

the patriarchal system', which Dorothy Bray refers to as 'the walking wombed'.⁴⁵³ This assumption rests on incomplete evidence, falling under what Juliette Wood considers the reclamation of the mother-goddess for modern feminist theorists, rather than being based on contemporary evidence as to the attitudes of early societies.⁴⁵⁴ That the early Celtic and Teutonic peoples – and for that matter the Greeks and any number of others – seem to have associated certain women with powers of prophecy and foresight does not necessarily reflect a status that would have been shared between all women. What both Brigids may show is an image of knowledgeable, generous Celtic womanhood, connected to pagan or Christian divine or both, and an ultimately benign figure who brought the light of both knowledge and the hearth. In St Brigid's shrine in Kildare, Gerald of Wales described an 'eternal flame' kept burning and tended only by the women of her order:

At Kildare, in Leinster, celebrated for the glorious Brigit, many miracles have been wrought worthy of memory. Among these, the first that occurs is the fire of St Brigit, which is reported never go to out. Not that it cannot be extinguished, but the nuns and holy women tend and feed it, adding fuel, with such watchful and diligent care, that from the time of the Virgin, it has continued burning through a long course of years....⁴⁵⁵

This flame, unlike that which warms the cauldron of *Preiddeu Annwn*, is kindled not by the breath of the women but by artificial means, for Gerald says that '...it is only lawful for women to blow the fire, fanning it or using bellows only, not with their breath.'⁴⁵⁶ Men, however, were not allowed to approach the flame.⁴⁵⁷ Kim McCone has noted the connections in hagiography between fire and knowledge, a sign of intellectual activity from Prometheus to the Pentecostal flame, and both versions of Brigid are associated with inspiration and intellectual endeavour.⁴⁵⁸ Importantly, the *Lebor Gabala* also attributes to Brigid's father, the Dagda, a cauldron from which 'no company would go...unsatisfied',⁴⁵⁹ As Marion Löffler also notes that 'a connected symbolism is that of resurrection of the dead', that this cauldron prefigures the examples found in *Culhwch*, *Branwen* and

⁴⁵³Bray, Dorothy. 'Saint Brigid and the fire from heaven,' *Etudes Celtiques* 29 (1992) 105-113. p. 111.

⁴⁵⁴Wood, Juliette. 'The concept of the goddess.' *The Concept of the Goddess*, Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, eds. (London 1996) 8-25, p. 9-10.

⁴⁵⁵Cambrensis, Giraldus. *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, Containing: The Topography of Ireland, and The History of the Conquest of Ireland*. (trans Thomas Forester, revised Thomas Wright, Cambridge OT 2000) p. 54.

⁴⁵⁶*ibid*.

⁴⁵⁷Bray, 'Brigit (saint)', p. 129.

⁴⁵⁸McCone, Kim. *Pagan Past and Christian Present* (Maynooth 1990) pp. 161-178. Bray, 'Saint Brigid', pp. 105ff.

⁴⁵⁹Macalister, R.A.S., ed. and trans. *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: Book of the Taking of Ireland*, vol. 4 (Dublin 1941), p. 107.

Preiddeu Annwn should be clear.⁴⁶⁰

A tradition exists suggesting the shrine at Kildare was built on the site of a prior shrine to Brigid the goddess.⁴⁶¹ The past is distant and clouded, and although Brigid the saint is well-documented, information on the goddess is limited to mentions in early Irish manuscripts. It is likewise impossible to know for certain whether Vesta and Brigid share some common ancient origin, or if the Celts, during their long association with Rome, adopted Vesta and made her into their own Brigantian image. That both the goddesses and the saint share such similar attributes does, however, suggest a process of gradual syncretism.⁴⁶² It also reflects a construction of a particular kind of divine or holy feminine figure: one who not only keeps the home fires burning, but is a generous hostess who can provide warmth and food for any and all she deems worthy of her hospitality. Since in the early Celtic world hospitality was also both symbol and practical effect of the protection offered a guest, the parallel with the blessing of a saint becomes even more clear.

Brigid is found more in Ireland than in Wales, and as Patrick Sims-Williams has shown, both the influence of Irish literature on that of medieval Wales and the extent of any common Celtic origin for much of both traditions is limited at best.⁴⁶³ A breadth of reading in both literatures, however, reveals a number of undeniable parallels, the nature of which has inspired scholars for over a century in attempts to trace their lineage. Furthermore, the texts themselves offer in-narrative explanations for the presence of the cauldron on both sides of the Irish sea, whether it is stolen by Arthur or brought to Wales by giants fleeing persecution. There are certainly differences in the portrayals of gendered ideals between the continent and the insular nations, and the construction of those ideals in Irish and Welsh literature is more similar to each other than to those elsewhere. Other Welsh tales are mediated through the genre of the romance, but the substratum of 'Celtic' masculinity remains anxious but intact. The portrayal of women also shows an underlying

460 Löffler, Marion. 'Cauldrons', *The Celts: History, Life and Culture*, vol. 1 John Koch and Antone Minard, eds. (Santa Barbara 2012) p. 155. Also Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence*, p. 234.

461 Bray, Dorothy. 'Ireland's Other Apostle: Cogitosus' Saint Brigit.' *CMCS* 59 (2010) 55-70, p. 56

462 McKone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 161-178.

463 Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, pp. 40-43 and chapter 9.

consistency, with many female functions remaining stable even during shifts in the sociopolitical context that defines their roles. Arthur's proclivity for rescuing prisoners is rooted in his obligations as a chieftain, as well as the homosocial bonds of loyalty between the men of the *teulu*. Meanwhile, the supernatural female forces with which the men come into conflict extend their domestic responsibilities outside the confines of the hearth itself, while displaying a distant alienation from actual domestic concerns.

The Brindled Ox

This leaves us with an active, aggressive Arthur, along with his warband and his bard, leaving his mortal kingdom to capture some treasures from a neighbouring realm. As shown above, Arthur here is a warrior king, whose masculine obligations include certain aspects of martial kingship – such as raiding – but are also linked to primitive notions of fertility and sovereignty. This brings us to the brindled ox.⁴⁶⁴ It is important to restate that unlike the prisoner and the cauldron, the *ych brych* itself is not explicitly listed as having been in Annwn. Mentioned only once in the text of *Preiddeu Annwn* and that indirectly, it does not appear until stanza V, when Taliesin has already shifted focus, and begun complaining about the incompetent monks: 'ny wdant-wy yr Ych Brych, bras y penrwy / seith vgein kygwng yn y aerwy'.⁴⁶⁵ This is the only reference to the animal within the poem, but the *ych brych* is also found in *Culhwch* as well as in Triad 45, 'The Three Principle Oxen of the Island of Britain'.⁴⁶⁶ It is associated in both cases with another ox, the *Melyn Gwanhwyn* ('[one who is the]yellow [of] spring'), and both Haycock and Bromwich note that the version of the triad in Peniarth 47 contains a variant form, 'ych brych bras y beuren', which appears to be a corrupted version of the 'bras y penrwy' ('with its stout collar') line in *Preiddeu Annwn* and suggests a link

464 'Brindled' is a term for an animal that is tawny or brown with streaks of another colour. Most animals in Welsh tradition relating to Annwn are white with red points, which may indicate the *ych brych* belonged to the mortal realm.

465 Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 437 'those who know nothing of the Brindled Ox, with his stout collar (and) seven score links in its chain.'

466 Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 125.

between the texts.⁴⁶⁷ With these brief references our only evidence for an associated tale, any discussion of its symbolism must of necessity be speculation. I include it as part of the spoils for three reasons. First, simply, its appearance in the poem at all. While Taliesin-as-narrator does tend toward digression, he also returns consistently to a particular event – Arthur's raid on Annwn. Only in the final stanzas, from line 49 onward, does he depart his initial tale completely; before that he can be seen winding around the subject, always returning to the centre. Secondly, it follows logically from the perspective of Arthur as a legendary and at least partly supernatural king who must prove his worth. And finally, the attested preference for tripartite structures on the part of medieval Welsh poets makes an adventure with three objectives rest more comfortably in the native tradition.

We know that cattle in the early Celtic world were both a form of currency and an expression of status. Finbar McCormick notes that the large body of documentary material '[...] provides a wealth of detail on the agricultural and social basis of society that is unparalleled in the contemporary western world'.⁴⁶⁸ Strabo and Caesar both note the importance of cattle to the early Britons, both for food and as sacrificial offerings.⁴⁶⁹ A poem to Gwallog, putative sixth-century king of Elmet, in the *Llyfr Talisein* speaks of 'gwyr a digawn godei gwarthegawc'⁴⁷⁰ ('men who fill the sheds of the cattle-lord'), while a poem praising Urien Rheged describes the cattle he has raided from a neighbouring kingdom:

yg godeu gweith mynaw, / a chwanec anaw
bud am li amlaw, / wyth vgein vn lliw
o loi a biw, / biw blith ac ychen
a phop kein agen.⁴⁷¹

This fits the traditional pattern, well-attested in Welsh and discussed in previous chapters, in which

467 *Ibid.*, also Haycock *LPBT* p. 447.

468 McCormick, Finbar. 'The decline of the cow: Agricultural and settlement change in medieval Ireland' *Peritia* 20 (2008) 210-225, p. 210.

469 Caesar, Julius, *Conquest of Gaul*, Trans. S. A. Handford and J. Gardner, (Harmondsworth 1982) p. 255-257. Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. H. L. Jones (Cambridge MA 1969) p. 249.

470 Williams, Ifor. *The Poems of Taliesin*, English version ed. J. E. Caerwyn Williams (Dublin 1968) p. 13. Translations of text from the poems to Gwallog and Urien Rheged are my own, as are any inaccuracies therein.

471 *Ibid.*, p. 5 : '...in the purpose of the battle of Manaw / and more wealth, and also a flood of victory,/ eight score of one colour of calves and cattle, / milk cows and oxen, and every other fair [thing]'.

a petty king attracts warriors by offering them a share of the wealth they seize from neighbouring lands.

Ireland, of course, offers a particular famous example of a cattle-raid story in the *Táin*, and two of its sovereignty figures, Brigid and Flidais, are said to own supernatural oxen that play a part in the shaping of the physical landscape.⁴⁷² St Brigid, according to Cogitosus, churned butter 'as other women do';⁴⁷³ domestic animals held an association with the women who milked them, made the cheese and the butter, and kept the domestic economy going. Of course the *ych brych*, like Brigid's Fea and Men, are oxen rather than cattle, and thus, associated with the fertility of the land – ploughing, farming, and agrarian cultivation. If indeed there is indeed a connection, it may well present the king not only as a warrior, but as protector of the land and livelihood of his people. Furthermore, the accusation that the monks 'ny wdant-wy yr Ych Brych' could suggest that the monks know nothing about ploughing, tilling, and labouring, rather than – or in addition to – the martiality of a raid. As a significant economic unit both cattle and oxen were, of course, also included in marriage dowries.

A genuine historical tradition of raiding is also reflected in its history and topography:⁴⁷⁴ according to the Middle Irish *Dindshenchas* (topography) poems, an onomastic story names Áth Cliath Medraige (Clarinbridge, Co. Galway) after the sons of Medb and Ailill, all of whom were called Maine, making their escape from Munster after 'the reaving of Dartaid's loved kine'.⁴⁷⁵ There was even a patron saint of cattle raiders, St Colmán Mac Luachán, who might bless the outcome of raids which didn't target cattle owned by a monastery.⁴⁷⁶ The *Annals of the Four Masters* record hundreds of references to cattle raids during the Middle Ages from the seventh century onward, and there are even more events that are likely to have included them in some capacity.⁴⁷⁷ Of course,

472Macalister, R.A.S., ed. and trans. *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: Book of the Taking of Ireland*, vol. 4 (Dublin 1941), p. 197.

473Bitel, Lisa. *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (New York 1998) p. 124.

474Lucas, A.T. *Cattle in Ancient Ireland* (Kilkenny 1989), pp. 125-99.

475Gwynn, Edward, ed. and trans. *The Metrical Dindshenchas* (Dublin 1906, repr. 1991), p. 316.

476Minto, Susie. *Leitrim Folk Tales* (Stroud 2013), chapter 7.

477O'Donovan, John, and Whitley Stokes, eds. and trans. *Cormac's Glossary* (Calcutta 1868), *passim*. Lucas *Cattle*, devotes a significant section to the details of these raids and their importance in Irish law, religion and culture.

gathering a warband and raiding the neighbouring territories is a both straightforward and profitable way of demonstrating superiority over rival leaders, resulting in both economic gain and the elevation of status – but furthermore there is considerable evidence that the stealing of cattle was related to the inauguration of Irish kings. Such inaugural raiding parties were given the name “*creach rígh*” (king’s raid), and by the late Middle Ages such events appear to have been, if not actually part of the inauguration procedure, at least the first thing a newly-appointed king was likely to do.⁴⁷⁸

It is dangerous, of course, to depend too heavily on Ireland for Welsh kingship traditions: similarities are obscured by time, mutual distrust between the two native cultures, and lack of records, therefore this is an area which will require further examination in the future. But as there is certainly considerable evidence of raiding between British petty kings within the historical and poetic traditions. In this context it is not difficult to imagine the story of *Preiddeu Annwn* as one of Arthur’s early adventures – as a not-quite mortal king, he could well be expected to exhibit properties of lordship over not only his own world, but Annwn as well.

Scholars such as Lincoln, Fitzpatrick and Dunn have also pointed to links between cattle raids, bride stealing, and the sovereignty figure in both Irish and other Indo-European traditions.⁴⁷⁹ Some of this rests on the work of Georges Dumézil and his emphasis on the tripartite sovereign-warrior-farmer functions of Indo-European society.⁴⁸⁰ This has the effect of forcing equivalencies where they may not exist, as it is too often necessary to reshape Welsh and Irish motifs in order to fit into Dumézil’s models. The repetition through disparate cultures of motifs which are likely to be common to agrarian or technologically primitive cultures does not necessarily reflect an actual shared tradition or common origin.

Ruth Arabagian suggested a parallel between the cattle raid and bride-stealing myths,

⁴⁷⁸Fitzpatrick, Elizabeth, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c 1100-1600: A Cultural Landscape Study* (Woodbridge 2004) p. 11.

⁴⁷⁹Lincoln, Bruce. 'The Indo-European Myth of Creation,' *History of Religions* 15:2 (1975) 121-45 for a detailed discussion.

⁴⁸⁰Brenneman, W.L. 'Serpents, Cows and Ladies: Contrasting Symbolism in Irish and Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myths.' *History of Religions* 28:4 (1989) p. 340.

reflecting an emphasis on the female goddess figure as the spiritual underpinning of a masculine-focused warrior culture.⁴⁸¹ Vincent Dunn also suggested that *tana* and *tochmarca*, cattle raids and wooing tales, were related to an initiation theme of Irish heroes, but that their amalgamation into the written cycle weakened their relevance.⁴⁸² While both Arabagian's study and Lincoln's fall somewhat short of the goal of establishing a real understanding of primitive Celtic culture, they are nevertheless useful in raising questions about the place of the cattle raid story within the mythological and literary tradition of Ireland, which may, in turn, shed light on its significance in Wales. Walter Brenneman rightly resists identifying the Celts with the entirety of Indo-European culture. He draws, in particular, a distinction between ancient cultures whose pantheon centred on a patriarchal sky god versus a matriarchal earth goddess, and places Ireland within the latter camp, stressing 'the sacrality of earth as witnessed by constant evidence of subterranean burial sites'.⁴⁸³ It must be said that while certain cultures may have dealt with the remains of their deceased by other methods, such as cremation, that burials by definition are unlikely to be found anywhere except underground. There is substantial evidence, at least, that the Irish Otherworld – in contrast to the Welsh versions such as in *Preiddeu Annwn* found on magical islands – was considered to exist primarily underground, but the existence of gravesites cannot be said to reflect a particular attachment to the idea or supremacy of an earth goddess.⁴⁸⁴

He also draws parallels between the cattle raid and the established sovereignty tale of the hag and her husbands, suggesting that the cyclical movement proposed by Lincoln, in which the cattle move from hero to foreigner and back to the hero, equates with the cyclical nature of the sovereignty myth, in which the old king is replaced by a younger and more virile version.⁴⁸⁵ He bases this off the premise that

481Arabagian, Ruth Katz. 'Cattle raiding and bride stealing,' *Religion* 14 (1984) 107-142, p 107.

482Dunn, Vincent A. *Cattle-Raids and Courtships: Medieval Narrative Genres in a Traditional Context* (New York 1989), pp. 222-3.

483Brenneman, Walter L. 'Serpents, cows and ladies: contrasting symbolism in Irish and Indo-European cattle-raiding myths.' *History of Religions* 28:4 (1989) 340-354, p. 344.

484Sims-Williams, 'Some Celtic Otherworld terms.' Also see John Carey, 'The location of the Otherworld in Irish tradition.' *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish literature*, ed. J Wooding (Dublin 2000) 113-119.

485Brenneman, p. 347.

When the chief mates with the hag, spring comes and the tribe gains new life. In the case of the cattle raid, king and queen are represented by the hero and his cattle. In some myths the cows are in the possession of a lady; thus a symbolic equation is established between cattle, queen, and cow lady. The lady and the cows are one. When the cows are stolen, symbolic death of the land ensues. When they are recovered, rebirth occurs.⁴⁸⁶

While the pairing of chief and hag, replayed over and over again in the loathly lady tales which populate medieval texts, is well-attested, to claim a symbolic connection with cattle seems in this instance arbitrary; the lady and the cows are said to be one because there is a lady and there are cows. It does not provide a compelling reason to equate the two, despite Arabagian's observation that in the cattle-stealing and bride-stealing myths, the object of either raid could be replaced without any significant change to the story.⁴⁸⁷ After all, the quest narrative – a hero, retrieving a thing from a distant place – is a genuinely universal aspect of storytelling worldwide. By equating the woman with the object of the cattle raid, Arabagian attempts to show that the theme of these two types of tales – the cattle raid and the bride-stealing tale – reflect the shift toward the patriarchal by demonstrating the subjugation of a putative great earth goddess to a male heroic figure.⁴⁸⁸ That the feminine and masculine forces come into conflict is certainly true, as in the references to witches noted above. There is also evidence of a connection between sovereignty figures and oxen or cattle: in the Book of Formoy version of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, Brigid is said to own two oxen, Fea and Men, from which comes the name of the plain of Feimhean; this onomastic episode fits with the long Irish tradition of supernatural women affecting the landscape.⁴⁸⁹ The Book of Leinster version gives the oxen to a woman called Flidais, who may be one of Brigid's foremothers. I do not think it is necessary, however, to conflate cows and women in these tales, especially as the cattle in the stories, if not in the actual, real-life raids, are frequently bulls. It is surely enough to see cattle, as a legitimate historical form of currency and therefore reflective of status and wealth, as bound up with the *concept* of kingship and sovereignty, for the simple and practical reasons noted above: that kings required wealth, and that superiority over one's neighbours could be shown by marching into their

⁴⁸⁶*ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷Arabagian p. 110.

⁴⁸⁸*ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹Wright, *Brigid*, p. 229. Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence*, p. 42.

territory with a warband and relieving them of their possessions. It is quite possible therefore that the *ych brych* is one of the spoils Arthur and his band are bringing back from Annwn; the poem has changed directions by this point and only specifies that the monks are unfamiliar with the story. In this light, Arthur's recovery of a prisoner, a cauldron, and the *ych brych* from the Annwn fortress can be seen as a triad of their own, one that reflects the establishment of his kingship, in fulfilment of the deeds expected of Celtic warrior kings.

Taliesin and the churchmen.

While *Pa gur* is uniformly heroic in its presentation of Arthur's men, the final sections of *Preiddeu Annwn* display a conflict between the two competing models of intellectual Celtic masculinity. While the warrior model may take on various forms and adhere to various ideologies at different points, it remains mostly unthreatened and self-contained. A recurring rivalry, however, between poets and clerics appears from time to time in the literature. In *Preiddeu Annwn*, the narrator Taliesin spends the last three stanzas berating monks for their lack of understanding of the mysteries of the universe:

Ny obrynafy lawyr llaes eu gohen
ny wdant py dyd peridyd Pen,
Py awr ymeindyd y ganet Perchen
Py vil a gatwant aryant a pen.
Pan aetham-ni gan Arthur, arfyrdwl gynhen
namyn seith ny dyrreith o Gaer Ochren.

Myneich dychnut val cunin cor
o gyfranc udyd ae gwidanhor
ae vn hynt gwynt, ae vn dwfyr mor
ae vn vfel tan, twrwr diachor.

Myneych dychnut val bleidawr
o gyfranc udyd ae gwidyantawr.
ny wdant pan yscar deweint a gwawr
neu wynt, pwy y hynt, pwy y rynnawd
py va a diua, py tir a plawd
bet sant yn diuant, a bet allawr.⁴⁹⁰

490 'I don't deserve to be stuck with pathetic men, with no go in them, / [those] who don't know on what day the Lord is created, / [nor] when, at noon, the Ruler was born, / [nor] what animal they guard, with its silver head. / When we went with Arthur – a sad conflict / save seven none came back from the Angular Fort.// Monks congregate like a pack of dogs / because of the clash between masters who know / whether the wind [follows] a single path, whether

This is not the only poem to present this attitude. Much of Taliesin's literary existence is dedicated to the exhibition of his own poetic prowess at the expense of all competitors, and he taunts other 'lesser' poets as much as he does the clergy.⁴⁹¹ In *Mabgyfreu Taliesin* he also disdains the monks and their perceived lack of knowledge about the world's mysteries, asking, 'Meneich a lëit, pyr na'm dyweit?'⁴⁹² Nor is it only poets who exhibit frustration with monks, but also the other way around; these two competing intellectual classes seem to have enjoyed a long and healthy rivalry.⁴⁹³ From the other perspective, a famous passage in Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* berates a Welsh king for preferring the praises of his court poets to the hymns of Christ's followers:

Your excited ears hear not the praises of God from the sweet voices of the tuneful recruits of Christ, not the melodious music of the church, but empty praises of yourself from the mouths of criminals who grate on the hearing like raving hucksters – mouths stuffed with lies and liable to bedew bystanders with their foaming phlegm. Hence a vessel that was once being prepared for the service of God is turned into an instrument of the devil, and what was once thought worthy of heavenly honours is rightly cast into the pit of Hell.⁴⁹⁴

While Gildas is criticising Maelgwyn, rather than the bards in his employ, for vanity, his description of 'mouths stuffed with lies' and 'foaming phlegm' are hardly complimentary to the poets themselves. Despite the vitriolic nature of some of this discourse, the actual animosity is likely to be exaggerated – evidence from later poetry shows that Welsh bards were not at all above making games of mockery, of themselves or others. Jerry Hunter and Dafydd Johnston have described a ritual of 'cyff clêr' emerging in the late middle ages in which a group of minstrels (*clêr*; referring to a lower class of minstrel, rather than *penceirdd*; an important distinction) satirise an important

the sea all one water, / whether fire – an unstoppable force – is all one spark. // Monks congregate like wolves / because of clash between masters who know, / they [the monks] don't know how the darkness and light divide, / nor the wind's course, its onrush, / what place it devastates, what land it strikes, / how many saints in the void, and how many altars.' Haycock, *LPBT* p. 437-8.

491 Haycock, *LPBT* p. 14-17.

492 Haycock, *LPBT* p. 242. 'You monks who read, why don't you tell me?' In this case, the Taliesin persona does not confine his disdain to religious men, however, as he also demands the same of 'eilewyd keluyd' ('skillful one of song'), presumably a fellow poet. *LPBT* p. 243.

493 Haycock, Marged. 'Preiddeu Annwn and the Figure of Taliesin.' *Studia Celtica* 18.19 (1983): 52-78, p. 57.

494 Gildas. *De Excidio Britonum* 34.6, in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, trans. and ed. by Michael Winterbottom (London 1978) p. 34

contemporary figure.⁴⁹⁵ While Johnston notes that the ritual itself cannot be traced further back than the fifteenth century, he calls attention to the 'hen draddodiad o wrthdaro rhwng penceirddiad a chlêr' attested in medieval Welsh poetry.⁴⁹⁶ With monks representing a literary learned class and the *beirdd* an oral one, they are certainly well-placed for a bit of dramatic literary opposition, and in any case the idea that monks – whose literary efforts are actually responsible for preserving the poets' works for posterity – bear the responsibility for stamping out a supposed pre-Christian Celtic heritage is one they still have difficulty escaping. Oliver Davies notes the presence of a 'Kulturkampf' between these two modes of learned tradition, between bard and book.⁴⁹⁷ He also suggests that the bards' high status, as 'genealogist and preserver of tribal lore and cosmology', may have incorporated a lingering tension stemming from their inheriting the function of the druids in an early, newly-Christian Wales.⁴⁹⁸ Poems like *Preiddeu Annwn* reflect a perceived ancient aspect to the conflict itself, and while the tension between poetry and Church may well be exaggerated, it was likely real.

It may be in the spirit of friendly competition or not, that *Preiddeu Annwn* and the other Taliesin poems serve to emphasise the poet's expertise in matters archaic and arcane. He is not the only such figure, nor do they only exist in Welsh. Sims-Williams and Haycock have both pointed to the narrator of the Old English poem *Widsið* as being in a similar vein, and elements of the formula are also present in the Song of Amergin from Irish Milesian mythology and the *Mi a wum* poem in the Black Book.⁴⁹⁹ *Widsið* says that he has been with Alexander, Offa, and Attila the Hun, amongst others; likewise Taliesin seems to have accompanied Arthur, Bendigeidfran, and Maelgwn Gwynedd. He has insinuated himself into every Welsh story of import, has been everywhere, seen everything, and understands everything in the world through his own personal experience; he claims

495Hunter, Jerry. 'Cydd-destunoli ymrysonau'r Cywyddwyr: cipolwg ar "Yr Ysbaddiad Barddol",' *Dwned* 3 (1997) 33-52; Dafydd Johnston, 'Erotica and satire in medieval Welsh poetry,' *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Expression*, J.M. Ziolkowski, ed. (Leiden 1998) 60-72, p. 65.

496Johnston, Dafydd. *Llên yr Uchelwyr: Hanes Beirniadol Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg 1300-1525* (Cardiff 2005) p. 384.

497Davies, Oliver. *Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales* (Cardiff 1996) p. 79.

498Davies, Oliver. *Celtic Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ 1999) p. 40.

499Sims-Williams, 'Early poems,' p. 38; Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 10.

to be expert in all the mysteries that plagued medieval philosophers and writers from Isidore to Bede. *Preiddeu Annwn* is not the only poem in which he does this. Haycock notes a number of examples in which 'he professes to be a sage who knows about science, materia medica, the movement of the planets, winds and waters' and issues 'challenges to other poets and other supposedly learned groups'.⁵⁰⁰ The character is also found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, in a dialogue discussing metaphysics, elements, nature and a long catalogue of types of fish.⁵⁰¹ The learned models of clerical and poetic masculinity are every bit as competitive as the martial warrior versions, but express that competition through mental, rather than physical, prowess. Taliesin's listing of his own knowledge in challenge to the monastic classes are a tournament of the mind, the *University Challenge* to the warriors' World Cup. These stanzas in *Preiddeu Annwn* are but a part of his continuous characterisation as self-proclaimed and self-important repository of traditional knowledge, a representation of and heir to the native bardic tradition stretching back through the centuries.

Together, these examples of early Arthurian poetry contain tantalising but obscure glimpses of an early Welsh tradition. Parallels and cognate motifs connections between *Pa gur*, *Preiddeu Annwn* and other Welsh and Irish tales suggest a number of motifs that formed part of the literary background of the medieval bards. Echoing a distinct treatment of magic, of kingship, of women as the keepers of the hearth and brave men on a raid against their magical neighbours as well as mortal ones, they present a view of a world in which gender is inextricably bound with supernatural function even within the natural world. *Pa gur* shows a *teulu* of heroic but also marvellous masculine warriors boasting of their deeds to gain acceptance into a community which requires them to prove their bravery, while *Preiddeu Annwn* presents some of these same men in the process of establishing themselves as leaders and warriors, and of Arthur as a king. Here, as in *Culhwch*, Arthur, despite having one foot in folklore, is a British king in the heroic model, who heads his own

⁵⁰⁰Haycock, *LPBT*, p. 11.

⁵⁰¹Geoffrey of Monmouth. *Life of Merlin*. Basil Clarke, ed. and trans. (Cardiff 1973) pp. 96-99.

battles, leads his own raids, and fights alongside his men. The witches and hags of *Pa gur* and the barely-mentioned ladies of *Preiddeu Annwn*, meanwhile, still manage to make their presence and legacy felt, as the heiresses of divine right mediated through a medieval worldview that still views them with both respect and fear. Descended from the priestesses that pre-date Rome, and now the caretakers of magical objects and the wardens of Otherworld fortresses, they are the precursors to the many enchantresses of the later Arthurian legend.

'Y Tair Rhamant': Gereint, Peredur, and the Lady of the Well

Any attempt to investigate the curious relationship between the Welsh Arthurian tales and their continental counterparts inevitably encounters the 'Mabinogionfrage', the ongoing controversy that surrounds the influences of the three *rhamantau* and their French cousins by Chrétien de Troyes – to what degree was Chrétien inspired by Welsh characters or mythologies, and how much, if any, native material remains? How much native material may have existed in the first place? The suggestion, first put forth by William Owen Pughe, that the *rhamantau* were 'the origin of romance writing in Europe'⁵⁰² and the original sources for Chrétien's poems was a product of the Romantic revival of the late eighteenth century, and has since fallen to the overwhelming evidence to the contrary — but the opposing view, that the Welsh versions had no existence of their own prior to Chrétien, is far from universally accepted either.⁵⁰³ The Goldilocks of the debate, the suggestion that both versions had a common source, still has a number of adherents, though the process of transmission is undoubtedly far more complicated. Loomis credited itinerant Breton *conteurs* with spreading the Arthurian legend to France, while Pierre Gallais and Constance Bullock-Davies suggested it may have come from Welsh interpreters in Poitiers.⁵⁰⁴ While Jones and Jones in their 1949 edition of the *Mabinogion* tell of a division between 'Continental' and 'Welsh' schools of thought, the current arrangement seems rather to inhabit a spectrum, with most scholarly opinion falling somewhere in the middle.⁵⁰⁵ At the very least, the Welsh names of the title characters are

502Pughe, William Owen, *Grammar of the Welsh Language* (Denbigh 1803), unnumbered introduction .

503Edel, Doris. 'The 'Mabinogionfrage': Arthurian Literature Between Orality and Literacy' (*Re*)*Oralisierung*: 84 *Script Oralia*. (1996), p. 311 p. 312.

504Loomis, R.S. *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York 1949) *passim*; Matthew Boyd, 'Arthurian vogues: Pierre Gallais's neglected evidence', *JLAS* 2:1 (2014) 80-83, p. 80; Constance Bullock-Davies, *Professional Interpreters and the Matter of Britain* (Cardiff 1996) p.9-10. See also Terence James, 'Bleddri ap Cadifor ap Collwyn, Lord of Blaencuch and Cil-Sant: fabulator of Arthurian romance?', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary* 33 (1997) and John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail* (Aberystwyth 2007), chapter 17.

505Jones, Thomas and Gwyn Jones. *The Mabinogion* (London 1949) p. xxvii. For the origins of the various arguments, see R.S. Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff 1956), I. Ll. Forster, 'Gereint, Owein and Peredur', *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford 1959), J. Loth, *Les Mabinogion du Livre rouge de Hergest* (1913, repr. Geneva 1975), Jean Marx, *La légende arthurienne et le graal* (Paris 1952), A.O.H. Jarman, *Chwedlau Cymraeg Canol* (Cardiff 1957), J.D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* (Baltimore 1923). For somewhat more recent discussions see Brynley Roberts, 'Peredur vab Efraug: A text in transition,' *Arthuriana* 10 (2000) 57-72, Glenys Goetinck, 'The Quest for Origins,' *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira Mahoney (New York 2000) 117-47.

attested in earlier sources: Owein ab Urien can be found shouting across a battlefield at the front of an army led by his father in one of the 'historical' poems in the *Llyfr Taliesin*, while his cousin Peredur is listed as one of the sons of Eliffer in the Harleian genealogies and amongst the warriors of *Y Gododdin* and the battle of Arfderydd.⁵⁰⁶ A Gereint, possibly the same one, is also listed as part of the doomed Catraeth mission, and the Triads include him, along with Gwenwynwyn mab Naf and March mab Meirchiawn, as one of the Three Seafarers of Britain.⁵⁰⁷ He is also the eponymous hero of a long poem which associates him with Arthur in Wales at a relatively early date.⁵⁰⁸ The whole of Arthurian literature is peopled with the names of old Welsh heroes, though not always with any trace of their original characters or attributes remaining, but the paltry evidence is too vague, too scattered, and too recent to draw any conclusions with certainty. The *rhamantau* – *Iarlles y Ffynnon*, *Gereint ac Enid*, and *Peredur fab Efrog*, contain elements of romance and heroism both, just as unmistakable folktale tropes can be traced through *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and *Preiddeu Annwn* seems to contain legendary aspects. The Mabinogionfrage is a question that cannot be answered here with the available data, but it is also quite possibly a question that *has* no answer – the evolution and adaptation of stories are too complex to lead back to some putative single authoritative Ur-text. In any case, it is not a mystery I intend to attempt to solve, believing with Gwyn and Thomas Jones that 'while the final miracle will always defy a logical and documented explanation, the Arthurian legend...became a priceless European inheritance, and part of the European imagination.'⁵⁰⁹ It is best to accept them as they are, and this chapter's focus on both Welsh and French versions of the tales is concerned not with transmission, but with context – how Welsh redactors and Welsh audiences may have held a unique 'horizon of expectation' that is reflected in their choice of stories.⁵¹⁰ Whatever their origins, the *rhamantau* as they survive are very Welsh stories with clear influences from Chrétien and his continental continuers in varying levels

⁵⁰⁶Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 346.

⁵⁰⁷Bromwich, *TYP3*, 28.

⁵⁰⁸Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 357.

⁵⁰⁹Jones, Thomas and Gwyn Jones. *The Mabinogion* (London) 1949 p. lxxv.

⁵¹⁰Jauss, Hans Robert, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis 1982) p. 88.

and degrees, and a peculiar type of tension is brought about by this juxtaposition. Brynley Roberts once said that he doubted 'whether the author of *Owein* could have conceived a narrative with the sophisticated chivalric themes of the tensions arising from the topos of courtly love and the hero's self-knowledge, had he not been aware of the developed form of the French romance.'⁵¹¹ That the author of *Owein* was writing in the form of a chivalric romance is clear, but not all the tropes, standards, and concerns of *fin' amor* translate directly or even well into the medieval Welsh cultural *milieu* and this tension informs the places where scholars such as Roberts suggest the *rhamantau* flounder. A closer look at the *rhamantau* will require first discussion of the tradition as a whole, and then a careful reading of each individual tale. As the sheer breadth of international adaptations of Arthurian material throughout medieval Europe mean it would be impossible within the scope of the current project to compare the Welsh tales to *all* extant comparable versions from continental Europe, comparative focus will be limited to the original verse romances by Chrétien de Troyes. This will necessarily leave some areas incomplete; the continuations of *Perceval* and its variant inheritors are especially problematic in terms of their potential relationship to *Peredur*. That Chrétien wrote in verse does not in itself indicate anything of the process of transmission or translation to Welsh, as evidence shows that medieval Welsh redactors often chose to preserve adaptations of foreign texts in prose and, in fact, narrative in Welsh was always in prose.⁵¹²

Where the French stories deal with the tension between courtly romance and knightly purity, much of the tension in the Welsh versions seems to stem from the shift of a tribal culture based around the war-band toward the courtly ideal of celebrating individual accomplishment. All three *rhamantau* explore the conflicting masculine roles within the warrior models and the obligations thereof within a societal group: *Peredur* deals with the influence of a young man's family and

511Roberts, Brynley F. 'The Welsh Romance of the Lady of the Fountain', A Grout et al, *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.B. Grout et al, Arthurian Studies 7 (Cambridge 1983) p. 181.

512Ifor Williams suggests that prose is the language of action in medieval Welsh, and a number of scholars have noted prose adaptations in Welsh from verse originals. See Ifor Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen* (Cardiff 1935) p. xxxviii, Ian Hughes, 'The early Welsh narrative tradition – a classification', *Proceedings of the Third Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* (Uppsala 1994) 43-66, p. 49, Stephen J. Williams, 'Rhai Cyfiethiadau', *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol*, ed. G. Bowen (Llandysul 1974) 303-11 p. 303, and others.

friends in the shaping of his life and behaviour, while *Owein* and *Gereint* navigate the balance between the responsibilities of a man as husband and lord and those as a knight or as a member of a *teulu*. They are coming-of-age stories, in which young warriors are formed into heroes and men, and how that becoming occurs is a distinctly different process, with a different outcome, in a medieval Welsh context than a continental one. Doris Edel suggests that 'in insular Celtic narrative tradition, the hero has his full potential right from the start and this makes it impossible for him to develop in any significant way. Any education he receives is more of a (magic) initiation than of an education in the proper sense.'⁵¹³

However, a closer reading shows this to be untrue. While the heroes may already be *naturally* possessed of the stuff of heroes, the series of quests and adventures in their stories make up the process of building them, both physical and socially, and their crises of identity are often reflected on their physical bodies. The over-determination of their status at the opening of the tales actually serves to destabilise their identities, requiring them to earn what they have already been given. Their stories involve learning to navigate the prevailing social structure and find their place in the world. It is not merely a matter learning to be a better warrior that their adventures seek to accomplish, but learning to be a better man. The women of the tales appear in varying degrees of characterisation in supporting roles: as teachers, as voices of conscience, as lovers and occasionally as friends, while the *Iarlles* of the Well and the Empress of Constantinople may also embody the land. It is a characteristic of medieval romance that women play supporting roles, determined and defined in relation to the male hero as transmitters and signs of certain parts of his identity. While this is a phenomenon far more widespread than only medieval romance, it is not necessarily universal. Within folktales, for instance – a less conservative genre than romance, and less concerned with preserving the status of the aristocracy – can be found brave young peasant girls, milkmaids, and displaced princesses having adventures of their own.⁵¹⁴ David Salter observes of

⁵¹³Edel, 'Mabinogionfrage', p. 316.

⁵¹⁴For a comprehensive look at female agency in folklore see Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London 1994).

medieval English romance that even the restricted roles available to women remain 'governed by masculine codes and concerns' and that women's experiences and voices are marginalised at the same time as the tales acknowledge 'the centrality of women in moulding and developing the identity of the male hero'.⁵¹⁵ This very marginalisation, however, can be subverted, and often is. This chapter will examine the ways in which, while their agency is not always readily apparent, some of the women of the *rhamantau* transgress boundaries of gender and socially constructed existence.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the genre of courtly literature, discussed in more detail in chapter one, and its adaptation into a native Welsh *milieu*. It will also discuss the term *rhamant* itself, a problematic and externally-imposed label serving as convenient scholarly shorthand, and suggest its reclamation as a useful and applicable term when dealing with this set of Welsh Arthurian texts. The following sections deal with each of the tales in turn. A look at *Owein* focuses on the hero's loss of his masculine warrior identity as a result of his abandonment of his lordly responsibilities, manifesting in his tenure as a wild man roaming the woods. It then explores the theme of homosocial friendship as a driving force for the tale and its ability to destabilise or preserve the social order. The section on *Gereint* will examine the ways in which the conflict between his public and private desires and responsibilities are overwritten on his physical form, and discuss the actual ambiguity of his position in society. Finally, I will look at *Peredur*, arguably the most problematic and complex of the three texts. This section will examine the role of female figures in constructing the masculine warrior identity of the hero, and the ways in which various motifs interconnect to form a particularly Welsh version of medieval masculinity marked by post-colonial concerns.

⁵¹⁵Salter, David. 'Born to thralldom and penance: wives and mothers in Middle English romance', *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature*, Elaine Traharne, ed. (Cambridge 2002), 41-59, p. 43.

Courtliness and romance in Wales

Few literary revolutions have had so much impact on the world's relationship with stories as can be claimed by the early writers of the medieval romance. The long shadow cast by this idealised fantasy of love stretches over centuries of writers, its influence on the shape of modern literature and culture still visible. That is not to say that its conventions, or the cultural space allotted them, has remained unchanged. As Fulton rightly observes, courtly poetry was relevant to and a product of a particular time and place – the development of an aristocratic ruling class emerging from the feudal system of eleventh-century Europe – and the unique circumstances of that time and place were fairly short-lived. Although a continuum can be seen from the twelfth-century troubadours to the fifteenth-century English lyric (and, I would argue, through the medieval revivals of the nineteenth century and the romantic comedy of the twenty-first), she observes a vast difference in the societal relevance of those same conventions.⁵¹⁶

The ideology of romance on the continent can be contrasted with the epic tradition of the *chansons de geste* – stories related the stories of Charlemagne and the 'Matter of France' and, like the Matter of Britain, provoked controversy as to the date and nature of their original composition.⁵¹⁷ Although the French idealised past is, like the Welsh Old North, presented as historical, the *chansons de geste* did not go extinct to make way for romance, but rather, than likely continued to be developed coterminously.⁵¹⁸ Despite the clear relationship of the Welsh *rhamantau* to the French courtly romance – namely that they contain many of the same characters and plotlines – in other aspects, the Welsh texts have more in common with the *chansons de geste* than their romantic counterparts. Both, for instance, portray a variety of the heroic masculine model which resists chivalric norms, privileging masculine homosocial co-operation above love-service, and both celebrate the collective identity of their heroes over that of the individual.⁵¹⁹ The *chansons*, focusing

⁵¹⁶Fulton, Helen. *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context* (Cardiff 1989) p. 1.

⁵¹⁷Hasenohr, Geneviève and Michel Zink, eds. *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age*. Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 239.

⁵¹⁸Gaunt, Simon. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 1995) p. 24.

⁵¹⁹Short, Ian, ed and trans. *La Chanson de Roland*. (Paris, 1990) pp. 16-17.

on the Matter of France, are considerably more concerned than the Welsh tradition with the centrality of religion, and the struggle of the protagonists to achieve salvation is shown as being of paramount importance. Most of the Welsh texts, while ostensibly as Christian as every other popular European text of the middle ages, are less overtly so; the characters reference God and descriptions of churches are plentiful, but even where characters are presented as pagan they are not significantly different from the Christian heroes. Peredur, for example, is relieved at one point to have discovered the family he has just rescued are not Christian, as it means he can speak to them without being in contradiction of his vow of silence. Like the continental heroes who encounter virtuous Saracens, however, he ultimately compels them to convert. This may be a matter of location, of course – *Roland*, for instance, is set during the Crusades, whilst the heroes of the *rhamantau* are located primarily within a British, albeit supernatural, landscape where saints had wandered for centuries.

The relationship of the *chansons* to other forms – the Spanish *cantar de gesta*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the Latin epics, as well as Welsh and English texts and the French romances – has been the subject of much debate. In some instances a clear pattern of influence or legacy can be seen – *Can Rolant*, for instance, or *Bowm de Hamtwn* – making the relationship less troubled than, for example, the one between *Owein* and *Yvain*. In others the shared themes and portrayals of collective, heroic masculinity suggests that rather than a pattern of cultural cross-contamination spanning all of medieval Europe at intervals, that there is simply a direction in which many societies will evolve, and may embrace similar cultural reference points at varying times. This is in keeping with Dronke's suggestion that 'the feelings and conceptions of *amour courtois* are universally possible, 'in any time or place and on any level of society'.⁵²⁰ While this is true, the limitations of the genre itself – for instance, that it concerns almost exclusively with noble characters and adheres to an idealised notion of a gendered chivalric society – of necessity limit participation by those who are not already part of the established noble, literary class. This is not a

⁵²⁰Dronke, *Love Lyric* vol. 1 p. 2.

genre where the clever peasant boy can marry the king's daughter or the milkmaid can land herself a prince; rather the nobility of the protagonists' bloodlines is of paramount importance. Furthermore, as Fulton responds, although 'the impulses behind courtly love literature may be universally possible, nevertheless each society has to re-invent the concept in accordance with its own values and requirements'.⁵²¹ To investigate those values and requirements, of course, is part of the purpose of this chapter.

Amongst the influences of the romances, not only of Chrétien but of Geoffrey as well, are the works of Ovid; the construction of *fin' amors* was based in no small part on his writings on love. Dronke finds in the literature of *amour courtois* the lingering influence of the *Heroides* and *Amores*, as well as many of the motifs and metaphors taken up by the troubadours in the twelfth century.⁵²²

While heroic sagas in many languages portray the deeds of established heroes and warrior-kings, the romance genre shifts its focus to the younger members of society – the *iuvenes*, whom Georges Duby called 'a mob of young men let loose, in search of glory, profit and female prey, by the great noble houses in order to relieve the pressure on their expanding power'.⁵²³ Even when taking place within an Arthurian milieu they do not focus on Arthur himself, nor does he take an especially active part in the narrative. In *Owein*, the real story begins only after Arthur goes to sleep; in *Peredur* he is silent during the assault which provokes the action. Chivalry is a young man's game, and chivalric romance concerned primarily with the coming-of-age tales of young knights. This remains more or less constant, not only through the French and Welsh versions, but those from England and the Low Countries as well. It lies in clear contrast with *Culhwch ac Olwen*, in which the protagonist accomplishes very little and even other characters note that he would never have been successful in his quest had it not been for Arthur's personal participation. This leads Kristen Lee Over to claim that 'the *rhamant* Arthur is recognizably continental' and that the literary colonialism inherent in importing a 'version of kingship at odds with the warrior of...*Culhwch ac*

⁵²¹Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym*, p. 5.

⁵²²Dronke, *Love Lyric*, vol. i. p. 163ff.

⁵²³Duby, Georges. *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Edward Arnold, 1977) p. 122.

Olwen'.⁵²⁴ Fulton, in contrast, rejects the sort of comparative treatment which sees Welsh stories as only inferior imitations of an idealised French discourse, and argues for judging the characters of the *rhamantau* as 'not as more or less successful versions of the psychologized liberal-humanist individual, but rather as social subjects produced by different discourses'.⁵²⁵ Aronstein also claims that the extant texts as they stand have their own commentaries, that they participate 'in the consolidation and formation of their own culture'.⁵²⁶ With Fulton and Aronstein, I would argue that the Welsh *rhamantau* represent a particular image of kingship and a gendered noble ideal rooted in a particular Welsh worldview.

Within this chivalric model of masculine action as a work-in-progress – a performance, as per Judith Butler, 'instituted...through a stylised repetition of acts' – the young knight must establish himself in the world.⁵²⁷ First, he must locate himself within the courtly space by taking up with a lord (in this case, Arthur) who can see him on his way to glory. He must then prove himself both in deeds of arms and deeds of love, and only after defeating a suitably impressive number of enemies and winning the love of a worthy noblewoman can he expect to settle down and enjoy his new adulthood. In this last aspect, the romances, whether the Welsh prose versions or Chrétien's verse, depart from the lyrics of the troubadour poets. The ultimate goal of a Guillaume IX or Bernard de Ventadorn is not marriage to the *domna* but a sexual culmination to their love-service; the two aspects are completely separate and marriage is not only irrelevant to the romance, but often at odds with it.⁵²⁸ This may have been in part because the emerging class of nobleman knights who both populate the romances and serve as their primary audience were young, unmarried, and in search of

524Over, Kristen Lee. 'Transcultural Change: Romance to *Rhamant*', *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. Helen Fulton (Dublin 2005) (183-204), 183. Interestingly, Michael Faletra suggests that Chrétien began the development of his romantic formula for the Anglo-Norman Plantagenet court in England, and that the colonial, expansionist discourse present in the French romances as regards Wales was related to England's real expansionist goals. This is a subject well beyond the scope of the current project, but presents an interesting perspective all the same. See Faletra, Michael, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century* (New York 2014) p. 101-102.

525 Fulton, Helen. 'Individual and Society in *Owein/Yvain* and *Gereint/Erec*', *The Individual in Celtic Literature: CSANA Yearbook 1*, ed. J. Nagy (Dublin 2001) 15-50, p. 23.

526Aronstein, Susan. 'Becoming Welsh: Counter-Colonialism and the Negotiation of Native Identity in *Peredur vab Efwrawc*', *Exemplaria* 17 (2005): 135-168, p. 140.

527Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York 1990), p. 135.

528Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 13.

fame and fortune; they saw themselves reflected in a genre that successfully rationalised love service to a lady with loyalty and service to both mortal overlord and God.⁵²⁹ For the heroes of romance, however, the ultimate goal is a stable adulthood with all its accoutrements, whether in the French context of an autonomous minor lord or the Welsh ideal of a renowned warrior within a *teulu*.

Even when marriage and a new role as head of a court, household or kingdom is the end result, the situation of the hero does not lead to dynastic longevity. Owein rules with his wife for three years, Peredur for fourteen, and Gereint takes over the rulership of Dumnonia in his father's old age, but none of them are said within the text to have fathered children. Gereint returns to his own kingdom only under protest, and 'ruled it successfully from then on...with praise and admiration for him and for Enid ever after', but Owein and, in the longer version of his tale, Peredur, end their stories having returned to Arthur's court and service, not as independent lords of their own petty kingdoms.⁵³⁰

In a realistic medieval setting, when Peredur returns to Arthur's court after his life with the Empress, he should have left behind an heir close to adulthood himself, but nothing more is said of his married, adult life.⁵³¹ Owein, who as a real historical person drawn into a number of folkloric and literary traditions has a more complex identity, is credited in other traditions with fathering St Kentigern, but in the Arthurian tales he too is childless.⁵³² Gereint, who appears in the Harleian genealogies as the ancestor of a kingly line, is shown spending enough time intimately in Enid's company that their lack of children seems unlikely indeed. But these are stories in which a family life would tie the heroes down and render them ineligible for the coming-of-age dramas in which

⁵²⁹Duby, Georges. *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett (Cambridge 1994) p. 34.

⁵³⁰Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 178.

⁵³¹Following the reading that the Empress of Constantinople is actually a rationalised fairy queen may explain Peredur's case somewhat. From Oisín to Thomas the Rhymer, folklore is full of men who spend years with the Faeries and eventually, for better or worse, return to the mortal world.

⁵³²Owein's literary biography has vastly eclipsed his historical one, and for all the traditions surrounding this character we have no real information at all about his actual life – what he accomplished, if he married or fathered children, or when and how he died. While it therefore feels somewhat disingenuous to refer to him by this stage as an 'historical' person, the wealth of traditional material suggests that the medieval Welsh considered him to be one.

they star. In this the *rhamantau*, as well as the Arthurian verse romances of Chrétien or Marie de France, exist only within their own close confines; establishment in the world is the goal but neither success nor failure has any lasting consequences. As members of Arthur's *teulu* they exist in their own right only as long as he does, and while the genealogies situate them within the family lines of real British noble houses, within the Arthurian milieu itself they have no heirs, no succession, and no future.

Both men and women occupy a limited set of roles, and the cast of characters is fairly set. There is the young hero, his mentors and allies, his detractors, sometimes a dwarf. For women, there are the roles of his lady-love or of a number of other women he must protect or do service to in order to prove his worthiness for her; there may also be an old woman, a witch, or the knight's own mother, each of whom do their part to establish and construct his identity. To point out – however rightly – that the options for female characterisation are extremely limited is to ignore that the same is true of the men. These are formula stories in which everyone plays their appointed role, explained by Salter as dealing with the 'growth and development of young men, and their emergence from a state of dependence on authoritative, parental figures, into a life of autonomy and independence' following an archetypal path of loss and restoration, exile and return.⁵³³ However, the texts subvert these expectations to varying degrees, allowing characters to transgress their expected roles in ways that leave the final products riddled with cultural anxieties.

The men are generally allotted more agency as to their own actions and movements, while the women seldom move or act at all, but remain static in place, awaiting wandering heroes. Although Gereint's Enid follows him all over the countryside – an action which in itself significantly alters her social identity – the standard model of romance is that the young knights-errant are the only ones moving, making their way through an expansive but static landscape full of repetitive encounters with evil earls, distressed countesses, and wondrous castles. These auxiliary characters have their own back stories, conflicts, and histories, but none of those can be resolved until the

⁵³³Salter, 'Thralldom and penance,' p. 43.

arrival of the hero.

In some ways, then, both the *rhamantau* and the French romances are able to both establish boundaries and traverse them. Just as Chrétien's Perceval leaves Wales to take his place in a French court, the heroes of *Owein*, *Gereint* and *Peredur* leave the context of the central Arthurian court to explore more distant lands, some of which adhere to the characteristics of medieval Wales while others do not. Most are not named the way that those of Chrétien's works are, possibly because the Welsh redactors are not trying to situate them within an actual British or European landscape but rather to expand their own borders into various foreign and supernatural realms. The single counter-example, Peredur's fourteen-year reign in Constantinople, is argued by Bromwich and others to be a rationalised, Orientalised otherworld rather than the actual Eastern kingdom.

Helen Fulton has described the problems inherent in judging the Welsh tales against their French counterparts:

In the French romances, the discourses of courtly love and chivalry call into being subjects of an elite class within economic feudalism, constructing ideals of economic autonomy and self-government to which the knightly class of medieval France aspired. In the Welsh romances, discourses of co-operation, loyalty and kinship interpellate subjects of the ruling group, the *uchelwyr*, within a tribal social and economic structure...the Welsh romances privilege collectivism and the strength of the group above the behaviours or desires of its individual members....⁵³⁴

With this in mind, many of the differences in attitude and narrative between the two versions are easily explained. While he may not be the chief driver of action as in *Culhwch*, nevertheless the *rhamantau* begin and end with Arthur. Owein and Gereint end their tales in service to Arthur, Owein as a valued member of his *teulu* rather than as autonomous lord of his own kingdom, Gereint as a petty king with Arthur as his acknowledged overlord. Peredur, in the longest version of his story, also returns to Arthur, though his status is ambiguous and there are reasonable arguments made that the later episodes may not have appeared in the original form of the tale.

The term *rhamant* itself is misleading, bestowed on the stories not by the authors themselves but by later scholars, beginning with Sir John Rhŷs and gaining further traction after the publication

⁵³⁴Fulton, 'Individual and Society' pp. 23-24.

of R.M. Jones's *Y Tair Rhamant*.⁵³⁵ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has shown that in fact, this externally-imposed label has little basis in the text itself, for although all three tales share some superficial similarities to various developments within the actual French romance genre, they lack 'many of the usual features of romance, or even dispenses with them or weakens them in adapting narrative material from French'.⁵³⁶ The adaptation of some of these features in the Welsh tales is the purpose of this chapter, but the term, troubled as it may be, remains a convenient shorthand by which to refer to stories that, despite not appearing together in the manuscript tradition, nevertheless share elements in common that appear to be adapted from aspects of French romance. Brynley Roberts has observed that 'the name "the three romances" began life as a useful label for three Welsh stories felt to be different from the other *Mabinogion*. But about 1960 the usage changes, and instead of being a description of three stories it begins to denote a group with its own unity....'⁵³⁷

He cautions further against over-emphasising the tales' similarities, or considering them to be the work of a single author.⁵³⁸ Lloyd-Morgan, meanwhile, points out that convenient shorthand has its pitfalls, and that naming them in this way 'encourages us to read them as romances and judge them as such'.⁵³⁹ I discuss and use the terms '*rhamant*' and 'romance' at some length in this chapter, but agree that we cannot judge them by the standards applied to French verse. If they are romance - which I believe they are - they are examples of a particularly Welsh romance, influenced and informed by but not wholly subsumed by the popular continental tradition. The first use of the term '*rhamant*' in Welsh appears in a poem by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (*fl.* c. 1155-1195) to his patron, and 'like the other poems Cynddelw presented to Owain Gwynedd, presents a heroic ideal, not a courtly one'.⁵⁴⁰ Is it possible to suggest that *Owein*, *Peredur* and *Gereint*, rather than being

⁵³⁵Rhys, John and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford 1887) viii-ix; Lloyd-Morgan, C. 'Medieval Welsh tales or romances? Problems of genre and terminology,' *CMCS* 47 (42-58) p. 42.

⁵³⁶*ibid.* p. 58.

⁵³⁷Roberts, Brynley 'The Idea of the Welsh Romance', *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter 1992) pp. 142-3.

⁵³⁸*ibid.*

⁵³⁹Lloyd-Morgan, 'Medieval Welsh tales or romances?' p. 43.

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 46.

considered poor imitations of a popular imported literary form, can themselves be seen as exemplars of a unique, Welsh, hybrid genre combining the native and the continental, the heroic and the courtly? Mikhail Bakhtin found the hybridity of medieval text forms part of their particular appeal, noting that they nearly always contain several competing discourses and fragments drawn from a variety of folktale and literary sources within a single text.⁵⁴¹ The *rhamantau* certainly include such fragments – the heroic ethos portrayed and challenged in *Y Gododdin* and Llywarch Hen, lingering aspects of ancient myth and legend, and *translatio* from a popular continental art form. The French romances themselves were subject to *remaniement* – 'rehandling' – according to context, leading to wildly disparate versions of the same story, rewritten, as Gaunt and Kay remind us, to fit the tastes of scribes, audiences, and patrons.⁵⁴² They also point out that *romans*, a name attached to a wide variety of medieval texts that do not necessarily share characteristics, 'can in fact designate almost any kind of vernacular narrative'.⁵⁴³ Meanwhile, D.S. Brewer defined the genre even more simply, as 'stories about being young and growing up'.⁵⁴⁴ While the inverse is obviously not universally true – romances might be stories about being young and growing up, but such stories are not always romances – surely this suggests, with Gaunt and Kay's definition, that the other elements common to medieval romance are flexible according to context. Lady Charlotte Guest's translations of medieval Welsh texts in the nineteenth century gave us the term *Mabinogion*, a mistake that has nevertheless become both useful and accepted as a manner of referencing certain texts and that carries with it the implicit knowledge of its own lexicographical limitations. In the same way we might re-appropriate the term *rhamant*, choosing to define it as a Welsh form of *romans*: a narrative in the vernacular, about being young and growing up, containing elements specifically of interest and cultural relevance to medieval Wales.

541Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX, 1981), *passim*.

542Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay, eds. in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge 2008) pp. 6-7.

543*ibid.* p. 11.

544Brewer, D. S. *Symbolic Stories: Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (Cambridge 1980) p. 74.

In any case the medieval redactors did not describe them as *rhamantau*. The colophon of *Owein* names it a 'chwedl', or story, while *Peredur* is called 'ystoria' in one version and 'kynnyd' in another, all implying a different level of authenticity. All mean essentially 'story', but *chwedl* has the implication of rumour or legend. It is, as noted by Diverres, 'a sophisticated literary development of the popular tale' and a generic classification in and of itself.⁵⁴⁵ Roberts explains the word is 'related to the Welsh verb *heb*, 'says, speaks.' The word conveys the sense of spoken material and is the generic term for an oral traditional story.⁵⁴⁶ *Ystoria*, like the Latin *historia* from which it stems, implies a written, rather than oral, source the accompanying implicit authority.⁵⁴⁷ Of course the concept of 'history' when dealing with medieval Arthurian texts is vague at best, stemming from an entire genre of pseudohistory that may or may not have been taken seriously by contemporaries; it seems safe to say, however, that the audience of the *rhamantau* were not expecting to see genuine historical figures doing genuine historical things. *Kynnyd*, the term used for the Peniarth 7 version of *Peredur*, is discussed further below and holds a meaning of 'reign after conquest'.⁵⁴⁸

French chivalric literature does not actually require much interference by the author to provide tension, based as it is on a romantic system that encourages balancing on the edge of adultery.⁵⁴⁹ Whilst an ideal knight might love his king's lady whilst she remains unattainable, in reality neither knights nor ladies are always equipped to teeter so precariously for long. This very thing, in the wider Arthurian tradition, causes the ruinous affair of Guinevere and Lancelot and brings down the whole of Arthur's kingdom. Adultery, whether in France or Britain, shakes the social order, and adultery amongst rulers – or at least their female consorts – causes the breakdown of society itself. The Four Branches are full of the message that illicit desire has disastrous

545Diverres, A.H. '*Iarlles y Ffynnwawn* and *Knight of the Lion*: adaptation or common source?' *Studia Celtica* 16/17 (1981-82) 144-162, p. 145.

546Roberts, Brynley. 'From traditional tale to literary story: Middle Welsh prose narratives,' *The Craft of Fiction*, Leigh A. Arratoon, ed. (Rochester, 1984) 211-30, p. 213.

547*ibid.*

548Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen. 'Migrating narratives: *Peredur*, *Owain* and *Geraint*,' *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Chichester 2009) 128-141 p. 130.

549Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 13.

consequences and the betrayal of one's proper place in the world brings that world tumbling down.⁵⁵⁰ This is not any great surprise; the social and economic structure of the middle ages is predicated on inheritance and succession and most literature of the period addresses it, from noble quests to folktales about third sons rescuing princesses and inheriting their kingdoms. If society is made up of a network of obligation and responsibility to one's societal and kin group, then the *rhamantau* are an exploration of how men might succeed or fail in those responsibilities, and what are the consequences when they do.

These themes of kinship, lordship and obligation are prevalent in medieval Welsh literature. The tales of the Four Branches navigate a complex map of reciprocal obligation between uncles, fathers, sisters, husbands and wives, much of which is easily identifiable within contemporary law. Within the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, the drama of the Second and Fourth Branches stems from the refusal of certain characters to adhere to the accepted moral code while the ultimate success of the heroes of the First and Third depends on their conscientiously following it. In the *rhamantau*, a young hero must learn to navigate these matters away from Arthur's court, in order to return to it a full adult member of his society. This chapter will show the ways in which native Welsh law and culture are reflected in the narrative details and built into the identities presented by the characters.

Owein, Chwedl y Iarllles y Ffynnon

The story of Owein ab Urien is found in three medieval manuscripts and some seven later ones. The former, which are of most concern to us here, include a single full version in the Red Book of Hergest and two incomplete ones in the White Book of Rhydderch and Jesus College MS 20. While the Red and White book versions have enough differences in the orthography to suggest

⁵⁵⁰Cichon, Michael. 'Eros and error: Gross sexual transgression in the Fourth Branch of *The Mabinogi*.' *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*. ed. Amanda Hopkins (Cambridge 2007) 105-115, p. 105. It is important to note that it is the sexual misconduct and betrayal of members of a kin group that result in societal breakdown; adultery itself, especially for men, is not always in itself a problem. Medieval literature is full of bastards.

they each followed different histories of transmission, they are also similar to conclude that there was little variation in the narrative itself.⁵⁵¹ Later manuscripts, as well as demonstrating an evolution of language, condense or leave out certain aspects -- such as the lion that serves as the hero's ally in battle.⁵⁵² The tale evidently remained in oral circulation for several centuries, as Owen Wynne Jones (known also by the bardic name Glasynys) recorded, around 1860, that he had heard 'an octogenarian woman in Merionethshire tell [the story] as her grandfather had around the fireside'.⁵⁵³ Thomson allows that the 'raw material' of the tale – especially the quest to defeat the defender of the storm-raising spring – may well have been mythological in its earliest form, but like most of the other texts we deal with here, the story as it stands can be dated with certainty only as far back as the twelfth century.⁵⁵⁴ Owein himself is 'one of the rare examples of the transference of a name complete with patronymic from insular Celtic sources into French Arthurian romance', having first appeared in a praise poem and an elegy in the Book of Taliesin, then adopted into hagiography as the father of Saint Kentigern in a story that appears to have some parallels with that of the Lady of the Well.⁵⁵⁵ Urien and his sons are attested in the Saxon genealogies as having fought the English around the mid-to-late sixth century and appear again in a collection of *englynion* from ninth-century Powys. Urien appears in the tale of the washer at the ford, in he fathers Owein on 'merch [...] y vrenin anyfwn' ('daughter of the king of Annwn'): the mythological figure Modron.⁵⁵⁶ Notably, neither Owein nor Urien appear in either *Pa gur* or the court list of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, though his sister Morfudd is counted amongst the ladies, so it may have been at a later date that Owein was drawn into the Arthurian orbit.

There is certainly something very archetypal in the supernatural setting that opens the quest.

551Thomson, R. L. 'Owein: *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnon*', *Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff 1991) 159.

552Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen. 'Migrating Narratives: *Peredur*, *Owein* and *Gereint*,' *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Chichester 2009) 128-141, 135.

553*ibid.*

554Thomson, R.L. 'Owain: *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnon*' *AOW*, Bromwich et al 159-170 (hereafter 'Owain(b)'). p. 160. Also see Sioned Davies, 'O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog: testun Llanstephan 58 o 'Iarlles y Ffynnon', *Cyfoeth y Testun: Ysgrifau ar Lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yr Oesoedd Canol*, Iestyn Daniel, Marged Haycock, Dafydd Johnston, and Jenny Rowland, eds. (Cardiff 2003) 326-348.

555Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 467.

556Rowland, *EWSP*, p. 234.

The twenty-four maidens in the castle described by Cynon and later visited by Owein are 'more beautiful than Gwenhwyfar...when she is at her most beautiful ever at the Christmas Day or Easter Day Mass,' suggesting that while the Queen and her ladies may be the most beautiful in Britain, that their attractiveness can still be surpassed by creatures not of the mortal world.⁵⁵⁷ The *iarlles* herself rules a land reached by supernatural means: the 'flying birds' are reminiscent of the birds of Rhiannon found accompanying the warriors of Bendigeidfran during their otherworldly sojourn in *Branwen*, and the strange natural phenomena that occur when the water is poured into the dish signal the presence of enchantment. Her very title, 'the Lady of the Well', evokes the tradition of holy or magical women associated with wells and springs, from Saint Gwenfrewi to the Lady of the Lake. Jessica Hemming has suggested that the very use of the word *iarlles*, as a foreign word not associated with any actual native status for ruling-class females, is an attempt to represent something magnificent and exotic, and that countesses in Welsh stories do not come directly from Chrétien, or Geoffrey of Monmouth, or from a native tradition. She proposes, rather, that the term is used as part of the Arthurian textual decoration to 'create an atmosphere of exotic foreignness' and distance the land of the *iarlles* and the fountain from the more familiar, domestic Arthurian court.⁵⁵⁸

Glenys Goetinck, in her study of *Peredur*, suggests that the motif of the sovereignty-granting goddess permeates the Welsh Arthurian romances, a conclusion echoed to varying degrees by both Ian Lovecy and Rachel Bromwich.⁵⁵⁹ The many difficulties and unquestionable limits to a mythological reading have been discussed at length already, and as I can find many instances where such a reading *could* apply but none where it *must*, will address it only as far as is useful. Whether the authors and redactors were aware of the origins of their themes has been the subject of some debate, and likely depends entirely on the education, literacy and interest of each anonymous author himself; it seems most likely that they were aware such stories were popular, and composed

⁵⁵⁷Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 117.

⁵⁵⁸Hemming, Jessica. 'The Curious Case of the "Countess" in the Welsh Romances.' Fourteenth International congress of Celtic Studies, Maynooth. 4 August 2011, and personal communication.

⁵⁵⁹Goetinck, Glenys. *Peredur: A Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends*. (Cardiff 1975) 129-155 *et passim*. Also Ian Lovecy, 'The Celtic sovereignty theme and the structure of *Peredur*.' *Studia Celtica* 12 (1977): 133-146 and Rachel Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes and the breton lays.' *Etudes Celtiques* 9 (1961): 439-71.

accordingly.

It is true that Owein marries the *iarlles* and rules over her land after defeating her husband, who forfeited his claim to it by no longer being able to defend it. Leslie Ellen Jones explains of the kingship-granting goddess that:

...once she is found in the Otherworld, it may be necessary for the hero to do battle in order to gain access to her; once she is attained, she may be abducted by a rival power, as Gwenhwyfar so often is.⁵⁶⁰

This motif is also examined by Goetinck, who includes as examples the Black Oppressor in *Owein*, the tournament of the sparrowhawk in *Gereint*, and the Miller and the Maiden of the Fortress in *Peredur*. In *Owein* the Gŵr Du, previous lord of the *iarlles*'s unnamed realm, loses his kingdom and his head, thus proving himself no longer capable of defending the land. Diverres, however, notes that the Life of Kentigern, circulating in the Scottish lowlands some time before Chrétien's *Knight of the Lion*, shows Owein encountering and seducing the princess of Leudonia (Lothian) near a fountain, 'and so already the association is between the fountain and a woman of flesh and blood, not a fairy'.⁵⁶¹ This demonstrates the duality or co-existence of multiple metaphorical threads within a single text or character; entities like the *iarlles* may be rationalised Otherworld figures or exoticised realistic ones, or contain some elements of both.

Goetinck suggests that the hero, after coming face to face with sovereignty in the guise of a woman, is helped and hindered along his path to lordship by various Otherworldly forces who function as guides or attempt to block his development. In *Owein* it is Luned, rather than the lady herself, who helps the hero on his way. She settles on the Owein as the new ruler-to-be and goes about setting him up for marriage; the *iarlles* is, at least at first, not at all interested in remarriage and certainly not with her husband's killer. Luned recognises this, but is undeterred from pursuing what she believes is the best course of action.⁵⁶²

'Dioer,' heb y Lunet, 'ny thebygwn i na bei well dy synwyr di noc y mae. Oed well ytti geissaw

560 Jones, Leslie Ellen. *The Function of the Otherworld in the Middle Welsh Arthurian Romance 'Owein, neu Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynawn'*. PhD Dissertation (UCLA, 1992), p. 24.

561 Diverres, p. 148.

562 Thomson, *Owein*, p. 14. 'There is no way she loves you, not in the very slightest.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.125.

goualu am ennill y gwrda hwnnw noc am peth arall ny ellych byth y gaffel.'
 'Y rof i a Duw,' heb yr iarllles, 'ny allwn i vyth ennill vy arglwyd i o dyn arall yn y byt.'⁵⁶³

The exchange itself demonstrates the tension between myth and characterisation, the ever-present dilemma of the Welsh romances and indeed of parts of the Four Branches as well. Valente observes that 'we give the women in these tales little leeway to act as ordinary human beings if we insist on reading them only as shadows of goddesses.'⁵⁶⁴ Perhaps in *Owein* the latent duality of a goddess-figure can be dealt with by doubling, splitting her into two people and retaining aspects of both mortal and divine in each: the noble *iarllles*, who while tied to the land she rules exhibits quite human mourning for her dead husband, and Luned, who as a handmaiden has more freedom in her actions, and can move directly onto the task of finding the next protector for the land. Her separation from the obligations of courtly performance allow her some flexibility in her movement and her social identity, and it has been noted by scholars of the French *Yvain* that much of her role involves transgressing the boundaries of typical gender constraints, appropriating for herself functions normally reserved for older, wiser men.⁵⁶⁵ Ellen Germain says 'her uniqueness stems from the fact that she actually plays the male roles in romance,' which may explain some of her actions.⁵⁶⁶ It also serves to give her something in common with the heroines of the Four Branches, who can be seen to transgress gender boundaries almost as matter of course.⁵⁶⁷ There need not necessarily, therefore, be a divine or mythological component at all. Medieval writers were not above personifying the attributes of reason and emotion in conflicting, or at least contrasting, characters, and Luned's practical advice is not so out of place that it requires any explanation

⁵⁶³Thomson, *Owein*, p. 15. "God knows," said Luned, "I really did think you would have more sense. It would be better for you to start worrying about replacing your husband than wish for something you can never have back." "Between me and God," said the countess, "I could never replace my lord with any other man in the world." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 126.

⁵⁶⁴Valente, *Merched y Mabinogi*, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁵Sullivan, J.M. 'The Lady Lunete: Literary conventions of counsel and the criticism of counsel in Chrétien's *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein*', *Neophilologus* 85:3 (2001), 335-354, p. 342. See also Jean Frappier, *Étude sur Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion de Chrétien de Troyes*. (Paris:Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1969), and Ellen Germain, 'Lunete, women, and power in Chrétien's *Yvain*.' *Romance Quarterly* 38.1 (1991): 15-25.

⁵⁶⁶ Germain, Ellen. 'Lunete, women, and power in Chrétien's *Yvain*.' *Romance Quarterly* 38.1 (1991): 15-25, p. 16

⁵⁶⁷So, of course, do certain male characters within the Four Branches. See Roberta Valente, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: crossing the borders of gender in Math.' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 35 (1988) 1-9 as well as my own MA thesis, *Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Aberystwyth 2009), which discusses the case of Aranrhod.

beyond the council of a trusted friend.

Michael Enright, in his analysis of female queen and prophet figures, notes examples of a supernatural function of serving-women within Irish literature that may shed light on the relationship between Luned and the *iarlles* not previously considered by scholars of Old French literatures. In two recensions of the *Táin*, a woman called Feidelm appears to Medb as she leads her army to Ulster. In Recension I, the woman tells Medb that she is a *banfili* of Connacht and has the art of *filidecht* ('divination'), part of *imbas forosnai* ('great knowledge which illuminates').⁵⁶⁸

In Recension II, Medb meets Feidelm after receiving an unsatisfactory answer to her queries from a druid. Feidelm calls herself *banchumal* ('bondmaid') – a slave who is also a prophetess.⁵⁶⁹ There is, of course, a significant difference between a slave woman and a lady-in-waiting, as Luned seems to be, and for all its magic, the court of the *iarlles* shows little resemblance to the courts of Wales or Ireland – but then, neither does Medb's. The two characters need not be related in order to claim some of the same functions, and a medieval tradition of female servants giving advance to queens may, Enright suggests, echo an older one in which seeresses were consulted for their wisdom or prophetic gifts.⁵⁷⁰ Of course, it may also speak to the tension felt by medieval monastic writers concerning female conversation – scenes in which two women talk to each other are not common in medieval literature, Welsh or otherwise, and what scenes do exist clearly reflect the anxieties of a class of men who had little interaction with women over what they could get up to when left alone. Karma Lochrie, for example, has found that the function of female gossip in medieval literature is almost entirely destructive:

When women get together in deliberate acts of female fellowship, corruption ensues. That is, at least, the official view. Medieval anxiety about female affiliation can be found in the widespread representations of female gossip – the chattering of the renegade religious recluse, the debased advice of La Vieille, the Old Woman in *Roman de la Rose*, or the recalcitrant whispers of women during Mass.⁵⁷¹

568Enright, Michael J. *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy, and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age*. (Dublin 1996) pp.172-3.

569*ibid.*

570Enright, *passim*, especially chapter 5.

571Lochrie, Karma. 'Between Women.' *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge 2003) p. 71.

Aelred of Rievaulx, whose writings reflect an intense anxiety about the dangers of associating with women, especially when compared to his assessments of male homosocial relationships, compares female to the chattering of magpies and accuses it of leading to ultimate, inevitable sexual and spiritual corruption. Even anchoresses, he says, are vulnerable to the spiritually destructive power of feminine gossip, which he envisions thus:

either tofore the wyndowe shal sitte an olde womman fedyng hir with tales, or elles a new iangler [gossip] and teller of tidynges of that monke, or of that clerke, or of widows dissolucion, or of maidens wantownes, of the whiche arisith lawghyng, scornynge and vnclene thoughtes, slepyng or wakyng, so that atte last the recluse is fulfilled with lust and likyng, bakbitynge, sclandre and hatrede and the tother with mete and drinke.⁵⁷²

Aelred's fears are not entirely of his own invention. Talking about sex was indeed a dangerous prospect to the medieval clergy, and the men of the priesthood found themselves requiring guidance from each other on how to handle the perils of hearing confessions that might lead them into 'unclean thoughts' themselves. Understanding that hearing about the sexual exploits of other people could lead to a certain amount of imaginative thoughts was an all-too-familiar situation to many of them, and if men of God could be led astray by such temptations, how could a woman be expected to resist?⁵⁷³ Combining this personal knowledge with the prevailing conception that women were already weaker, more sensual, and more likely to succumb to temptations of the flesh, churchmen like Aelred felt they had reason to fear. Most threatening of all are old women, who, possessed of worldly experience, are less easily led and frequently well-placed to lead the younger ones astray. While Luned and the *iarlles* are not actually discussing sex (except perhaps very indirectly as an expected consequence of marriage), certain medieval writers attributed an erotic component to the very act of female conversation, and this eroticism informs their continued anxiety. The fifteenth-century work *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son* condemns women for talking during Mass, but

572Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, trans. and ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt (London 1984) p. 1. '...either before the window shall sit an old woman, feeding her tales, or else a new gossip and teller of tidings of that monk, or that clerk, or of the dissolution of widows or wanton maidens, of which arise laughing, scorn and unclean thoughts, sleeping or waking, so that at last the recluse is filled with lust and liking, backbiting, scandal and hatred as well as with meat and drink.' Translation mine.

573Elliot, D. 'Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray' *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis 1997) p. 10.

more specifically for talking about the men, and how 'þe schort gamentes round all abouȝt / and how þe stuffyng off þe codpece berys ouȝt' ['the short garments round all about, and how the stuffing of the codpiece bears (stands) out']; it is clear that the sexualisation of speech, rather than the interruption of Mass, is his primary concern.⁵⁷⁴ In Wales, of course, women were also talking in church. Dafydd ap Gwilym's *Merched Llanbadarn* is more concerned with his own sexual achievement than in the women's morality, but nevertheless he castigates them for their gossip and its destructive effect on his own happiness:

A chwedyl hir edrychwyf
Dros fy mhlw ar draws fy mhlwyf,
Syganai y fun befrgroyw
Wrth y llall hylwyddgall, hoyw:

'Godinabus fydd golwg —
Gŵyr ei ddrem gelu ei ddrwg —
Y mab llwyd wyneb mursen
A gwallt ei chwaer ar ei ben.'

'Ai'n rhith hynny yw ganthaw?'
Yw gair y llall geir ei llaw,
'Ateb nis caiff tra fo byd,
Wtied i ddiawl, beth ynyd!'⁵⁷⁵

The female speech in *Merched Llanbadarn* is most certainly erotic, and superiorly so; the implication of the girls' own sexual experience and worldliness leaves them both aware of the poet's allegedly adulterous intent with the '*ferch goeth*' and unimpressed with his '*wyneb mursen*'. In another of Dafydd's poems, *Cyngor y Bioden*, he is castigated by a female magpie for his uselessness in love. The chattering rejection of the magpie, who tells him, 'Ofer i ti, gweini gwŷd, / Llwyd anfalch gleirch lled ynyd' ['You are wasting your time, pursuit of vice, / undignified half-witted grey old man] and then goes on to detail why, precisely, he is unworthy of female attention, is clearly standing in for the girl herself.⁵⁷⁶

574D'Evelyn, Charlotte, ed. *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son* (London 1935) p. 210.

575Dafydd ap Gwilym. 'Merched Llanbadarn.' trans. Huw Meirion Edwards, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 2015.

<<http://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.htm>> [accessed 11 May 2015] 'And after I'd been staring long / over my feathers across my fellow parishioners, / the sweet radiant girl would hiss / to her companion, so wise, so fair: / 'He has an adulterous look — / his eyes are adept at disguising his wickedness — / that pallid lad with the face of a coquette / and his sister's hair upon his head.' / 'Is that what he has in mind? / says the other girl by her side, / 'While the world endures he'll get no response, / to hell with him, the imbecile!'

576Dafydd ap Gwilym. 'Cyngor y Bioden,' trans. Dafydd Johnston, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 2015.

Lochrie observes that in these representations

women's gossip, unlike male gossip, is nearly always erotic, since it tends towards sexual transgression, or alternatively, proceeds from a sexually promiscuous nature. Women speaking together...incite each other sexually with their stories in a kind of homoerotic tale-swapping.⁵⁷⁷

Even when the talk may actually contain no sexual or erotic component, the tendency of the medieval writers to define women according to their gender before other considerations means that their speech is also thus defined: women, in these texts, are *women* before they are anything else, objects of desire and tension for men who certainly consider themselves the protagonists of their own lives. The lack of masculine control over female speech informs a profound anxiety. This is surely a contributing factor to why medieval literature as a whole contains so few examples of women talking to each other. Women are only seldom given their own voices, even though those voices are necessarily mediated through the male author or redactor. When they do, 'good' female characters are likely to endorse the system of their own oppression.⁵⁷⁸ The separation between the sexes, so common for much of society, resulted in a place for women that was safe, but set aside completely from the masculine public sphere, and this very safety is what the male writers find the most threatening.

It is this female space that Owein enters as almost a token male protector. Even in this magical realm the movements of women are limited to the domestic. Luned's advice that the *iarlles* must remarry immediately stems from the realistically logical belief that 'na ellir kynnal dy gyfoeth di namyn o vilwryaeth ac arueu' ('the kingdom can be defended only through military might and weapons'), and judging from the later part of the story, where another countess is having her realm stolen from her piece by piece, this is not necessarily wrong.⁵⁷⁹ Even when the *iarlles* realises that Owein is the one who killed her husband, her anger is short-lived in the face of Luned's practical reminder, 'Handit gwell itt, arglwydes; pei na bei drech noc ef nys dygei ynteu y eneit ef.'⁵⁸⁰

<<http://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.htm>> [accessed 11 May 2015]

577Lochrie, 'Between women,' p. 73

578Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 63.

579Thomson, *Owein*, p. 16. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 126.

580Thomson, *Owein*, p. 16. 'All the better for you, lady; had he not been stronger than your lord, then he would not have taken his life.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 127.

Idealistic romanticism comes face to face with the reality of medieval pragmatism.

Owein, meanwhile, claims he has fallen in love with the *iarlles* as soon as he lays eyes on her. This is typical of courtly romance and tales of *fin amour*, in which couples need not necessarily meet in order to feel erotic passion – rather, the distance and obstacles are an important component of desire – but also fairly representative of medieval Welsh literature in general, which seem to prefer not to spend too much time dwelling on the details of courtship and emotional connection. This is not to say that a Welsh audience would not have identified their literary heroes as being human with a full complement of understandable human emotions and concerns, but rather, were likely used to decoding other cultural markers as representative signs of a protagonist's internal life. It is certainly an emotional state in which he first sees the *iarlles* walking in her husband's funeral procession:

...,gwelei ef gwreic velen a'e gwallt dros y dwy ysgwyd, ac a gwaet briw amyl yn y brigeu, a gwisg o bali melyn ymdanei gwedy y rwygaw, a dwy wintas o gordwal brith am y thraet. A ryued oed na bei yssic penneuy byssed rac dyckynet y maedei y dwylaw y gyt. A hyspys oed gan Owein na welsei ef eiryoet gwreic kymryt a hi, beyt uei ar y ffuryf iawn.....A phann welas ef y wreic ennynu a wnaeth o'e charyat yny oed gyflawn pop lle yndaw.⁵⁸¹

This is the usual manner in which knights in romance fall in love. It is not so different from Chrétien's version, but the latter takes some time to dwell on the nature of Love as an overwhelming, inescapable force, while this is the extent to which we see Owein's feelings explained or described. Love is actually a perfectly good reason for him to marry. The *uchelwyr* of medieval Wales were necessarily landowners, and a native body of inheritance law that prohibited daughters from inheriting property meant that unlike the young French knights-errant, Owein's status and wealth are already established. In order to maintain a *bonheddig* family, his wife must be a noblewoman, but he does not need to marry into money. When he confides his newfound infatuation to Luned, however, she is unimpressed, despite her own plans to see the two married,

⁵⁸¹Thomson, *Owein*, p. 14. '...he could see a lady, her yellow hair let down over her shoulders and covered with the blood of many wounds, and she was wearing a dress of yellow brocaded silk, which was torn...And it was surprising that the tips of her fingers were not worn away, so violently did she wring her hands together. Owein was certain that he had never seen such a beautiful woman, if she had been in her usual form....And when he saw the woman he was inflamed with love for her until it filled every part of him.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 125.

and tells him, 'na char hi dydy na bychydic na dim'.⁵⁸² Nor does this ever seem to change. There is more realism than romance in this marriage, for while Owein might have been inflamed with love, his new bride, in common with many medieval noblewoman, is looking above all for a strong sword to defend her rights to her land. Even this is less troubling than the result of the French tale, in which the countess must be coerced into marrying Yvain not once, but twice, apparently against her will and better judgement: first, when Lunete deceives her by claiming to have gone to Arthur's court to fetch Yvain, and again at the end of the text when she convinces Laudine to agree with a union with 'the Knight of the Lion' while omitting the fact that said knight is her own estranged husband.⁵⁸³ While Luned's devotion to Owein is unassailable, the *iarlles* herself shows no signs of infatuation. Rather, while recognising the need for remarriage, she consults with her advisors – as did Cilydd in *Culhwch ac Olwen* – and first attempts to find a more local husband:

A pheri dyfynnu y holl gyuoeth y un lle drannoeth a oruc y iarllles, a menegi udunt uot y hiarllaeth yn wedu, ac na ellit y chynnal onyt o uarch ac arueu a milwryaeth: 'ac ys ef y rodaf inneu ar awch dewis chwi, ae un ohonoawch chwi am kymero i, ae vvg kannyadu ynneu y gymrut gwr a'e kanhalio o le arall.' Sef a gawsant yn eu kyghor, kanhadu idi gwra o le arall.⁵⁸⁴

It is curious that none of her assembled vassals or councillors volunteer to marry her and take over the rule and defence of the kingdom themselves. The description of the Gŵr Du's funeral procession has already established that the men of the court are well-armed, but they are ineffectual; throughout the whole of the tale the closest they come to capturing or attacking anyone is when the boys imprison Luned. This is consistent with a genre in which wandering knights stumble upon residents of castles and kingdoms who are incapable of resolving their own affairs, and similar to themes in folklore, in which brave young lads encounter enchantments, curses, and kidnapped princesses. As we shall investigate further in the analysis of *Peredur*, the Otherworld landscape is full of such characters; wandering knights are likely to be aggressive while stationery ones are too

⁵⁸²Thomson, *Owein*, p. 14. 'There is no way she loves you, not in the very slightest.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.125.

⁵⁸³Kibler, William, ed. and trans. *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin 1991) pp. 295-380.

⁵⁸⁴Thomson, *Owein*, p. 17. 'And the next day the countess had her entire kingdom summoned to one place, and she told them that her earldom was unoccupied, and could be defended only through horse and armour and military prowess: "So I'm giving you a choice: either one of you take me, or let me take a husband from elsewhere to defend the kingdom." And they decided to allow her to take a husband from elsewhere.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, pp. 127-128

young, too old, or in some other way incapable of functioning as warriors.

In the French *Le Chevalier au Lion*, the lady is more central to the action and motivation than in the text actually bearing her name. While espousing troubadour ideals of chivalry imported to England from France by Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Welsh worldview had not completely integrated them, and this causes a tension in the Welsh romances not present in their French counterparts. Kirsty Chandler argues that while Chrétien 'transformed the characters of Arthur and other Brittonic heroes through the ideological discourses of chivalry and courtly love', that the worldview of the British audience did not quite allow them to fully adopt it, and so the chivalric elements became a decorative but ultimately useless backdrop for a peculiarly Welsh story.⁵⁸⁵ In this she follows O.J. Padel, who says 'the Welsh romances are thus structured as if written within the same new genre as Chrétien's romances, but omitting the primary purpose of the genre', that is, the ideology of courtly love.⁵⁸⁶ Meanwhile, R.M. Jones, following Piquemal, suggest that the tension lies between 'the old heroic ethos and new ideals of chivalry,' an idea developed further by Fulton and on which I have already devoted some time.⁵⁸⁷

That is, of course, not the only difference between the two cultures' versions. Fulton points out the variations in 'the way they [each] construct lordship, and therefore the normative relationship between noblemen and society, based on real-life differences between the political and economic situations in France and Wales at the time'.⁵⁸⁸ Wales during the Norman period lacked the centralised government of England or France, but rather was comprised of a number of smaller kingdoms and principalities descended from an older tribal system and run by the noble class of princes. The period between 1066 and 1282 was one of intense anxiety for Wales and the British identity and Arthur was a mechanism through which to explore national identity and sovereignty within a number of local contexts.

⁵⁸⁵Chandler, *Masculinity*, p.126.

⁵⁸⁶Padel, O.J. *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff 2000) p. 79.

⁵⁸⁷Jones, R.M., *Tair Rhamant Arthuraidd* (Caernarfon 1998) pp. 29-30.

⁵⁸⁸Fulton, 'Individual and Society,' p. 24.

Therefore, when Owein is instated as ruler, lordship comes with responsibility and he is required to take an active role in the defence of his land and the fountain. He takes on the role of warrior king, despite his own activities now being contained to a single location:

...a delei o varchawc yno, Owein a'e byryei ac a'e gwerthei yr y lawn werth. A'r da hwnnw a rannei Owein y varwnyeit a'e uarchogyon hyt nat oed vwy gan y gyfoeth garyat dyn o'r byt oll no'r eidaw ef.⁵⁸⁹

This is not precisely the role of the heroic kings of the Old North from which the fictional Owein can claim historical lineage. The barons of the Land of the Well, unlike the men of Arthur's court, show no more taste for military expedition than they did when the *iarlles* offered to marry one of them; they admire it and respect its necessity in Owein as ruler but take no part themselves. His importance as defender is in contrast to Yvain in *Knight of the Lion*, in which his role in 'keeping up the quaint custom of defending the fountain' appears to be primarily ceremonial.⁵⁹⁰ The effect on the land of Owein's neglect of this duty, both initially when he departs for Arthur's court for the allotted three months, and later when he abandons it completely, are never discussed. Fulton puts his final abandonment of the Well into an historical, social context, suggesting that Owein 'gives up his claim to non-Welsh lands in order to remain in the service of his Welsh lord', but the fate of the land, without its symbiotic countess or its masculine defender, is left unexplained.⁵⁹¹

It is only the men who go adventuring. As for the furtive and stationery women of *Culhwch*, the first half of the story contains little female movement, even when it appears otherwise. Leslie Ellen Jones notes,

None of the women depicted, Gwenhwyfar and her handmaidens, the twenty-four women at the caer of the Gŵr Melyn, Luned, or the *Iarlles*, moves beyond the confines of her llys or caer. Even Luned's energetic movement is more apparent than real: she never does get the gate of the caer raised so that she may leave, and although the *Iarlles* thinks that Luned has travelled to Arthur's court for a champion, in reality [she] has been holed up in her *lloffft* with Owein.⁵⁹²

Throughout Welsh heroic poetry and much of the corpus of medieval Welsh literature in general,

589Thomson, *Owein*, p. 17. '...whatever knight came [to the well], Owein would overthrow him and ransom him at his full value. And Owein would share that income among his barons and his knights, so that no one in the whole world was more loved by his subjects than he.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 128.

590Fulton, 'Individual and Society,' p. 44.

591Fulton, 'Individual and Society' p. 47.

592Jones, *Function of the Otherworld*, p. 224.

women are the symbols of what remains when men go off to have adventures and seek honour and glory. In the binary dichotomy of the genre, men are mobile while women are static. While wandering women are found in native literature, they occur primarily in instances, such as the wanderings of Culhwch's mother and stepmother or the exiled Heledd, to indicate instability or distress – because they have been deprived of, or made uncomfortable in, their own homes, and their Othered, outsider status is reflected in their movements. But while the *iarlles* has neither the power to defend her land nor to leave it, she maintains the authority to exile the unwanted from it. This is the fate with which she threatens Luned, and when Owein abandons his wife and the responsibility of defending the well to return to Arthur's court, he is later informed that he has been banished from a land that remains ultimately hers. Exile, in the medieval world, was a serious consequence; survival depended on the bonds of kinship and loyalty with family and friends in both a social sense and a real physical one. In the Fourth Branch, Math fab Mathonwy effectively excommunicates his fleeing nephews by banning anyone in the kingdom from providing them with food or drink, forcing them to return and submit to his punishment.⁵⁹³ Outside the realm of literature, the medieval Papacy wielded excommunication as a political tool, using the immortal souls of a ruler and his subjects to bring him under Church control. Furthermore, for the *iarlles* to exile Owein from her kingdom is to deny him all the progress he has made so far toward manhood: his wife and his kingdom. A ruling lord is no longer needed when he can no longer fulfil his obligations, and as Tolkien suggests, it is his behaviour rather than the result that are central to such tales, using the tale of the frog prince to demonstrate that '...the point of the story lies not in thinking frogs possible mates, but in the necessity of keeping promises (even those with intolerable consequences) that, together with observing prohibitions, runs through all Fairyland'.⁵⁹⁴ If Owein has signed on to be the protector of this realm, whether mortal or Otherworldly, then protect it he

593Hughes, Ian. *Math uab Mathonwy* (Dublin 2013) p. 7. A record in Peniarth 164 (14th century) explains that if someone is 'cited lawfully' and expected to appear in court, 'the judge is to pronounce a sentence of food-forbiddance upon him...with punishment to such as shall feed him, and lodge him.' *Math* pp. 62-63.

594Tolkien, J.R.R., 'On fairy-stories,' *Tree and Leaf* (Oxford 1964) p. 59.

must.

But 'real men', Chandler tells us, 'cannot be content in relative perfection and seem to need to leave in search of harsher realities', so perhaps Owein is no more able to remain in the land than the *iarlles* is to leave it.⁵⁹⁵ Wandering, in these tales, is crucial to the ultimate stability and construction of the hero's warrior self. The coming-of-age narratives requires that he be dislocated and thrown into unfamiliar situations, and the destabilisation of his martial identity by prolonged exposure to court life demands he test and prove himself. Initially, however, the realities he leaves his wife for are not especially harsh – he merely returns with his friends to Arthur's court, accepted readily back into the fold of friendship and family as if his entire adventure had been of little consequence or result. Only after being informed he is no longer welcome in his wife's lands does he show any interest in returning to them.

To regain his lost wife and kingdom, he must make amends. He retreats in shame to wander the wilderness, where he goes mad. His uneasiness leads to a loss of his own human masculine identity and he becomes a 'wild man':

A thrannoeth y bore y kyfodes ac nyt llys Arthur a gyrchwys namyn eithaued byt a diffeith vynyded. Ac ef a vu y velly ar dro hynny daruu y dillat oll, a hynny daruu y gorff hayach, ac yny dyuawd blew hir trwydyaw oll; a chytgerdet a bwystuilet gwyllt a wnai, a chytymborth ac wynt yny oedynt gynefin ac ef.⁵⁹⁶

It is clear from this description, in keeping with the medieval convention of the wild man in the woods, that there is a greater trouble for Owein here than merely estrangement from his lady. The loss of his identity is absolute; through a process of discarding the trappings of his civilised life not only the warrior disappears, but the human. He is not alone here within the corpus of medieval literature; in other times and other texts, other romantic heroes will plunge similarly into madness. They share certain characteristics regardless of genre: they live apart from civilisation, are covered with hair and preternaturally strong, a necessity in order to survive a landscape populated by wild

⁵⁹⁵Chandler, *Masculinity* p. 165.

⁵⁹⁶Thomson, *Owein* p. 21. 'The next morning he got up and he did not make for Arthur's court but for the remote regions of the world and the desolate mountains. And he wandered about like this until all his clothes disintegrated and his body all but gave out and long hair grew all over him; and he would keep company with the wild animals and feed with them until they were used to him.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 131.

animals and genuine monsters.⁵⁹⁷ The growth of hair in particular is used as a marker of wildness; if we have seen in the previous discussion of *Culhwch ac Olwen* that grooming is a visible indicator of humanity, the lack of it represents not only the hero's alterity but can evidence a guilty conscience. St John Chrysostom is said to have grown a thick coat of hair while living as a hermit after committing murder, while another tradition holds that Cain, the first and foremost villain of the Christian age, was exceptionally hairy.⁵⁹⁸ Its usage can range from merely an indicator of sin to a visible aspect of 'part of...penitential suffering', especially when, as in the St John Chrysostom story, the hair finally falls away to reveal soft, perfect human skin.⁵⁹⁹ While Owein has not committed a crime as such, nevertheless his guilt at the neglect of his duties manifests itself physically on his body – but so too does his exile, as if the very act of casting him out of his lands (despite his not occupying them at the time) marks him as wild, homeless, and separate from society.

The wild man in all his incarnations was a popular figure who made frequent appearances not only in literature of the medieval period, but 'on ivory caskets and mirror-backs; on spoons, bed-hangings, and tapestries; and...in misericords, roof-bosses, and carvings upon porches and around fonts'.⁶⁰⁰ He occupied an ambiguous position in the natural order – not wholly beast but neither wholly man, more than an animal but with only the unfulfilled potential to become human. The growth of hair and the discarding of clothes are the outward characteristics of wildness, overwritten on an otherwise proper and complete masculine body that can no longer incorporate the trappings of a warrior identity.

Richard Bernheimer distinguishes the courtly hero under a temporary affliction from the prophetic wild man such as Lailoken or Merlin:

Having lost the tie that bound them most strongly to courtly society, they find the wilderness the only environment congenial to their sense of disorientation. There they wander aimlessly through the glades, subsisting on the raw flesh of wild animals or on the alms handed to them by pious hermits,

⁵⁹⁷Bernheimer, Richard. *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA 1952) pp. 12-14.

⁵⁹⁸Williams, Charles Allyn, *Oriental Affinities of the Legend of the Hairy Anchorite, vol. I: Pre-Christian* (Chicago 1925), pp. 9-13; Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley 1981) pp. 70-72.

⁵⁹⁹Yamamoto, Dorothy. *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford 2000) p. 164.

⁶⁰⁰Yamamoto, *Boundaries of Human* p. 145.

until a miracle or the soothing touch of femininity restores them to reason.⁶⁰¹

In addition to the abandonment of masculine identity and, with it, masculine responsibility, Bernheimer notes a link between the man's mental state and his place within his lover's affections. This connection is further explored by Yamamoto, who adds that 'from that lost relationship, and implicitly too from all the attachments and obligations of a courtly way of life, the knight flees into the wilderness'.⁶⁰²

It is the lover's rejection that prompts the physical change, to be sure, but that same rejection was, after all, prompted by a disregard that presages its own physical manifestation. The wild man is not capable of the devotion to a lady that the romance demands of its male heroes, for much like running around naked and eating his food raw, his erotic urges become primitive and instinctive. Perhaps the boundary between warrior and *wodewose* is already fluid, for, as with Arthur and the giant of Mont-St-Michel, a victorious hero must embrace his more animal self in order to overcome a monster.⁶⁰³ The discourse of chivalry, unlike that of the heroic warrior, mediates this dilemma through the ideal of love-service; the lady's presence mitigates the man's violent urges. The heroic model, by contrast, is predicated on a form of masculinity which requires men to regulate their own baser instincts. The temporary wild man, however, is not so far beyond redemption as his wholly-fallen counterpart. In the stories related on those mirror-backs and box covers, the wild man fights the knight for sexual possession of a lady.⁶⁰⁴ But while these two aspects of masculine performance should appear at opposite ends of the spectrum, the truth is the line between them is blurred and fluid. In romance or *rhamant*, the knight and the wild man are one and the same, and he must therefore do battle within himself before she can heal him with her acceptance. For Owein, in his hybrid text, the best efforts of the women of his acquaintance can only superficially restore his humanity; it is on himself to reclaim it.

In *Yvain*, the hero is brought back to culture slowly, through his limited interactions with a

601*ibid.* p. 14.

602Yamamoto, *Boundaries of Human* p. 177.

603See previous chapter on *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

604Bernheimer, *Wild Man* pp. 122-3.

local hermit who ensures he eats cooked, and therefore civilised, food; *Owein* proceeds, rather, to the healing ointment applied by a widowed countess. In both cases, the lady and her maids are riding and see a creature they can tell is human – 'eilun dyn a'y delw' (in the shape and form of a man) – but not recognisable as a legitimate member of the social order.⁶⁰⁵ In Chrétien, closer inspection on the part of the maid reveals a scar that betrays Yvain's identity, and it is because of his reputation that the lady agrees to use her precious ointment to heal him.

For Owein, he remains anonymous until much later in the text, and his transformation back to a man is physically painful as well as mentally troubled:

Ac ymphen rynhyawd hi a'y gwelei ef yn cossi y vreicheu ac yn kyfodi y vynydd, ac yn edrych ar y gnawt, a chymryt kewilyd yndaw e hun a oruc mor hagyr y gwelei y delw ry oed arnaw. Ac arganfot a oruc y march a'r dillat y wrthaw, ac ymlithraw a oruc hyny gafas y dillat, ac eu tynnu attaw o'r kyfrwy, ac eu gwiscau a oruc yndanaw, ac escynnu ar y march o abreid. Ac yna ymdangos a oruc y vorwyn idaw, a chyfarch gwell idaw i oruc.⁶⁰⁶

Karen Lurkhur (following to some extent the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Leslie Finke) argues that a knight's warrior identity is dependent on the tools of his trade – armour, horse, and sword – and that these elements must be incorporated into his body-image before he is able to assert control over them: that armour 'contributes to a particular ideology of the chivalric body' and transforms it into an idealised construct.⁶⁰⁷ The basis for this comes from the body-image theory developed by Paul Schilder, a psychoanalytic model centred around the premise that one's self-image of the body is 'created by our visual, tactile and thermal impressions, its location in space...and relation to other objects'.⁶⁰⁸ Elizabeth Grosz drew on this to postulate that tools and implements which make up an essential part of the identity of the self are incorporated into the body-image, and that things 'which we use on a daily basis thus become extensions of our bodies'.⁶⁰⁹ In this way the spindle and distaff became a symbolic representation of medieval woman, or for

⁶⁰⁵Thomson, *Owein*, p. 21. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 131.

⁶⁰⁶Thomson, *Owein*, p. 22. '...before long she could see him scratching his arms and getting up, and examining his flesh, and he was ashamed to see how hideous his appearance was. And he saw a horse and clothes nearby, and dragged himself until he reached the clothes and pulled them to him from the saddle, and he put them on, and with difficulty he got on the horse. And then the maiden made herself known to him, and greeted him.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 132.

⁶⁰⁷Lurkhur, Karen, 'Body and identity in *Le Chevalier de la Charette*,' *Viator* 45:2 (101-116) p. 102.

⁶⁰⁸Lurkhur, 'Body and identity' p. 101.

⁶⁰⁹Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington 1994) p. 80.

another example drawn from Welsh literature, the staff wielded by Math fab Mathonwy in the Fourth Branch can be read as an extension of his corporeal body.

The identity of the warrior, then, requires certain tools of the trade. While the specific necessities might vary at points in the literary continuum – he might require a horse, a *teulu*, or armour along with his weapon of choice – he cannot be a true warrior without them. The importance of these physical elements of identity in native Welsh literature is explicit, exemplified by the three things denied Lleu by his mother Aranrhod in the Fourth Branch. She refuses him a name, weapons, and a wife: the three things that would mark his personhood and confirm his place within his kin group and social order. Within a chivalric genre, the male protagonist's knightly identity is dependent on his relationship with and position in relation to women. His lover, in particular, mediates his identity. Owein's transformation from wild man is a genuine physical struggle as he attempts to shed the hair, the posture, and the dirt that indicate his troubled state and reclaim his chivalric masculine body. The transformation into wildness is not exclusive to the *rhamantau* in Welsh, but it is rationalised here. Lleu in the Fourth Branch also goes feral after the disintegration of his relationship with his wife, but rather than a wild *man*, he literally becomes a wild *animal*, incapacitated by his own grief and unable to tend his own wounds or see to his physical well-being.⁶¹⁰ Blodeuwedd's adultery has undone him, and only Gwydion's intervention, as a representative of his patriarchal kin, can restore him.

Only after Owein finally succeeds in dressing and pulling himself onto the horse does the maiden reveal herself and reinitiate him into human society. Unlike her counterpart in *Yvain* she does not know the stranger's name, but he has now successfully identified himself as man rather than beast, although her mistress bemoans that she has 'treulaw gwerth seith ugein punt o iryeit gwerthuawr wrth dyn heb wybot pwy yw' (spent one hundred and forty pounds worth of precious ointment on a man without knowing who he is).⁶¹¹ Ensconced in the castle with 'fwyt a diawt a than

⁶¹⁰Hughes, *Math*, p. 19.

⁶¹¹Thomson, *Owein*, p. 23. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 132.

a gwely ac enneint' ('food and drink and fire and bed and bath') Owein's metamorphosis continues; the excessive hair falls off his body in 'toruennu kennoc' ('scaly tufts') and 'a gwynnach oed y gnawt yna no chynt' ('his flesh was whiter than before').⁶¹² He comes out the other side of his transformation even more human than before – white, renewed, and unsullied.

Thus healed, he witnesses what could have been the fate of his own wife – a neighbouring earl is conquering the lands of his rescuer piece by piece. Owein finally recovers his sanity completely when he avenges his rescuer and reclaims her lands, but he is still not ready to return to his own. That he is not yet ready to be welcomed back by his wife is particularly apparent when he discovers Luned, now imprisoned, and does nothing to rescue her. Only after two further episodes — one in which he rescues a lion and another where he kills a giant – does he come back to defend Luned and be reunited with his wife, finally ending the story not as lord of his own earldom, but as the leader of Arthur's warband.

Owein's arc is then complete. He has demonstrated his ability to fulfil the conditions of adult masculinity by successful martial behaviour and heterosexual marriage. He has undergone the cycle of loss, exile and reintegration required of romantic heroes, his identity destabilised by removal from his social group. Finally, he has reclaimed the physical and social aspects of his adult self and assumed his place as a fully participating member of society. The importance of that society, and the effect of his behaviour on it, will be discussed in the following section.

Friendship and Homosocial Desire

In Chrétien's French tale, friendships between women work to support society and the status quo while men's homosocial relations are destructive; it is the bond between Lunete and Laudine which provides the necessary stability to the realm, but Yvain's devotion to Gauvain that causes him to forsake his wife and abandon his responsibilities. This is likely the result of some of the generically-dependent conflict present in romance, which, according to Gaunt, attempts to

⁶¹² *ibid.*

destabilise the homosocial arena by introducing a female element on which the masculine identity rests.⁶¹³ Welsh literature, by contrast, tends to privilege friendship between men, often, as in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, at the expense of everything else, and this is a primary cause of tension between Owein and the *iarlles*. Already an important theme in the Four Branches as well as the old heroic verse, friendship is shown nearly exclusively between men, as brothers-in-arms, with little suggestion that men and women could be friends, as opposed to lovers or enemies — or those two things together. (Meanwhile friendships between women are seldom shown at all; in this regard *Owein* is unique amongst Welsh Arthurian literature.)⁶¹⁴ The camaraderie of the mead-hall and the bond it forges between warriors plays an important role in the *Gododdin* and *Canu Llywarch Hen*, and the court of Arthur, which functions as a family in which the knights are almost always seen feasting when they are at home, is the direct descendant of that motif. Therefore it is notable that so much of this story hinges on the friendships of a single female character, in both driving the action and forming the relationships between other characters. Luned's friendship with the *iarlles* is to be expected, if its explicit portrayal is not; they are both ladies who have lived a long time together in close quarters and in some ways appear to be alternate facets of the same person, a conventional example of 'doubling'. Her relationship with Owein himself, however, is ambiguous, at once both refreshingly simple and archetypally complicated. It is not romantic, nor ever sexual; it is not courtly, nor is it merely the patronage of an Otherworldly maiden for a mortal champion. While tinted with the echo of the Otherworldly guide who trains the hero to meet his fate, it is also human, affectionate, and engagingly complex.

The homosocial relationships between the men and those between the women in the narrative act in parallel as impetus for the plot, in which both the hero and his intended wife are pushed into action by the chiding of a friend. Cai's gentle ribbing of Owein is what prompts him to

⁶¹³Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 75ff.

⁶¹⁴There are scenes which may be interpreted as depicting female friendships in the Four Branches, but within the Arthurian prose tales, women's interactions are almost exclusively with men. The conversation between Culhwch's stepmother and the hag can hardly be considered a friendship.

take up the quest in the first place:

'Ha wyr,' heb yr Owein, 'ponyt oed da mynet y geisaw dywanu ar y lle hwnnw?'
'Mynn llaw vyg kyfeillt,' heb y Kei, 'mynych y dywedut at dy dauawt yr hynny peth nys gwnelut ar dy weithret.'⁶¹⁵

The interaction, which is interrupted shortly after by Arthur waking up from his pre-dinner nap, is entirely casual and, in fact, familial, with Arthur and Gwenhwyfar acting *in loco parentis* to the knights; the queen's exchange with Cai evokes the image of a mother settling a dispute between her children. Arthur's court is far from a grand place in this story; where the author of *Culhwch ac Olwen* describes the fine ladies and knights and the luxuries of the palace, the scene in *Owein* is really just a group of close friends bickering whilst waiting for supper. Thomson observes that this informality is a more accurate reflection of life in twelfth-century Wales than a grander landscape, and this Arthur 'is not Geoffrey's conqueror of western Europe but the local chieftain in relaxed mood on his home ground'.⁶¹⁶ In this context, Cai does not appear genuinely malicious, but is merely exhibiting brusque personality for which he is known, and when Gwenhwyfar calls him to task he responds that she herself has said the same thing — the atmosphere is playful rather than actually accusing. However, the conversation has the allegedly desired effect: Owein sneaks off after the meal to ready his horse, and the next morning ventures off to prove Cai wrong. In other circumstances, Cai himself has proved unreceptive to teasing. In *Culhwch ac Olwen* his break from Arthur is made complete by an ill-received joke, notably one that called into question his own loyalty and friendship with his comrades: 'ac am hynny y sorres Kei hyt pan uu abreid y uilwyr yr Ynys honn tangneuedu y rwng Kei ac Arthur.'⁶¹⁷ The bond between companions is not to be taken lightly for Cai; Owein, a more junior member of the *teulu*, does not respond nearly so forcefully.

Luned and the *iarlles* have an equally harsh-sounding conversation that also ends with the accuser getting her way. J. M. Sullivan suggests that Chrétien, in his version, is establishing private

⁶¹⁵Thomson, *Owein*, p. 20. "'Men," said Owein, "wouldn't it be good to try and find that place? "By the hand of my friend," said Cai, "you often say with your tongue what you would not perform in deed.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.121.

⁶¹⁶Thomson, 'Owain'(b) p. 161.

⁶¹⁷Bromwich and Evans, *CO*, p. 35. 'And because of that Cai sulked, so that the warriors of this island could hardly make peace between Cai and Arthur.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 207.

council as emblematic of emerging twelfth-century individualism, but within a private chamber is also consistently the one place where women are able to speak for themselves.⁶¹⁸ Luned chastises the lady for mourning her husband rather than immediately seeking a new one — a heartless, if practical, reaction from a friend, but Luned has already settled on Owein as the next lord of the land. After a short argument in which the *iarlles* claims she would have Luned executed were it not for old times' sake, Luned declares 'mevyl idi ohonam y gyntaf a yrro att y gilyd'⁶¹⁹ and stomps out of the room. Then the moment of reconciliation occurs: 'A chyfodi a oruc yr iarllles hyt ar drwys yr ystauell yn ol Lunet, a phessychu yn uchel. Ac edrych a oruc Lunet tu draechefyn, ac emneidaw a oruc yr iarllles ar Lunet. A dyuot drachefyn a oruc Lunet att yr iarllles.'⁶²⁰

The cough, though not a verbal exchange, is nevertheless a very telling part of the conversation, coded as an affectionately intimate act which makes what follows seem as if it is what they have both expected all along.⁶²¹ Whether in the mortal, 'civilised' world of Arthur or the distant land of Luned and the *iarllles*, the court is a place where people live, chat, fight, nap, have midnight snacks, and tease each other. The *iarllles* claims to have brought Luned up, suggesting that she claims a maternal role over her handmaiden similar to that of Arthur and Gwenhwyfar at Caerleon.⁶²² It may even be that Luned is significantly younger than the *iarllles* and really has been raised by her as a daughter; if she is still a young girl herself this would go some way to explaining why her designs on Owein, whom she obviously finds attractive, are entirely limited to acquiring him for her mistress.⁶²³

Luned's sudden and devoted friendship with Owein is less obvious than that with the *iarllles*, and less easy to explain. The first moment she sees him, he is trapped in a portcullis, hardly a grand

618 Sullivan, J.M. 'The Lady Lunete: Literary Conventions of Counsel and the Criticism of Counsel in Chrétien's *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein*', *Neophilologus* 85:3 (2001), 335-354, p. 337.

619 Thomson, *Owein*, p. 15. 'Shame on whichever of us first sends word to the other.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.126.

620 *ibid.* 'The countess got up and went to the chamber door after Luned, and coughed loudly. Luned looked back; the countess beckoned to her. And Luned came back to the countess.'

621 Morgans, Lowri Haf, 'Iaith y corff yn y chwedlau canoloesol Cymraeg' (Mphil Aberystwyth 2011); eadem 'Iaith y corff a'r *Mabinogion*: Rhagolwg', *Dwned* 18 (2012) 11-32, p. 27

622 Thomson, *Owein*, p. 15. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.126.

623 This was originally suggested to me by Jessica Hemming at ICCS XIV in Maynooth.

or impressive introduction, and yet she declares:

'Duw a wyr na weleis i eirmoet was well no thidi wrth wreic. O bei gares itt, goreu kar gwreic oedut; o bei orderch itt, goreu gorderch oedut. Ac wrth hynny,' heb hi, 'yr hynn a allaf i o waret itti, mi a'e gwnaf.'⁶²⁴

It is difficult to say how precisely she came to these conclusions, though this too might be easily explained by adolescence. In Chrétien's version, Lunete recalls a visit she had previously made to Arthur's court where Ywain had been the only knight courteous enough to speak to her, and she now remembers him; there is no indication in the Welsh text that they had ever met before.⁶²⁵ Neil Thomas suggests that her motives and assessment are purely practical, as his defeat of the Gŵr Du means he must be the best person to replace him, and that the more effusive parts of her greeting stem from a worldview in which sexual and martial virility are viewed as linked together – he has been victorious in battle, therefore he must be a good lover.⁶²⁶ Chandler, however, suggests that Luned's reasoning is in fact 'clearly political, and has nothing to do with romance'; rather that her motivations are entirely focused on ensuring the kingdom is defended.⁶²⁷ In this context her declaration can be seen as an illocutionary act itself, a way of 'sweet-talking' Owein into taking on the responsibility of guarding the fountain.

One important aspect of the scene is that Luned not only acts, but she *looks*. The tenet of the 'male gaze', borrowed into literary criticism from film theory, explains the phenomenon in which a text or medium presupposes the default audience member to be male, Western, and heterosexual, and positions women as objects of desire and possession while simultaneously denying female desire.⁶²⁸ Men, as Putter argues, propel the plot as active subjects while women are 'frozen as portraits.'⁶²⁹ Jessica Hemming has noted examples of an unusual subversion of this in two early Irish

⁶²⁴Thomson, *Owein*, p. 12. "...God knows I have never seen a better young man for a woman than you. If you had a woman friend, you would be the best friend a woman could have; if you had a mistress, you would be the best lover. And because of that," she said, "whatever I can do to rescue you, I will" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 123.

⁶²⁵Chrétien *Arthurian Romances* p. 307.

⁶²⁶Thomas, Neil, "Gereint" and "Erec": A Welsh heroic text and its continental successors', *Trivium* 22 (1987) 37-48 p. 41.

⁶²⁷Chandler, *Masculinity*, p. 169.

⁶²⁸Mulvey, Laura. Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: an Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford 2009) pp. 94-103. The concept of the Male Gaze was introduced by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16:3 (1975) 6-18.

⁶²⁹Putter, Ad. 'Arthurian literature and the rhetoric of effeminacy,' *Arthurian Romance and Gender* (Friedrich

tales, *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Táin Bó Fraích*, two stories in which women are not only seen to be actively gazing and desiring, but to be acting on that desire.⁶³⁰ Luned as well sees Owein and desires him, though for her mistress rather than herself, and then acts on that desire by arranging his rescue.

The text itself does not dwell on her gaze, but lets her give voice to it. The act of Luned and Owein's gazing is curiously entwined here, for the narrative itself describes his view, rather than hers:

...sef a gwelei trwy gyswllt y dor heol gyfarwyneb ac ef, ac ystret o tei o bop tu y'r heol. Ac [ef] a welei morwyn benngrech uelen, a ractal eur am y phenn a gwise o bali melyn ymdaneî, a dwy wintas o gordwal brith am y thraet.....⁶³¹

This collection of stock images itself is formulaic; the same description is used for female characters both major and minor throughout the genre, and may have functioned, as with other literary formulae, as a way for the performer of the tale to concentrate on the action that would come next. Luned's appearance is no more unique than if the text merely said, 'Owein saw a girl.' Although his eye lingers on her, she is not functioning here as an object of desire; rather he is simply physically incapable of looking anywhere else. While the text actually employs the point of view of Owein the outsider to describe the scene, the fact of the matter is that he himself is immobile, trapped between the portcullis gates – he, not Luned, is really the object to be gazed upon. Men are often uncomfortable with being the object of scrutiny, and in this case, the consequence of visibility for Owein is likely to be his own execution.⁶³² The irony of the scene is that the final outcome and real benefit of Luned's active gazing at Owein is to make him invisible to the men who are hunting him.

Luned's inexplicable loyalty to Owein never falters. She arranges his life to her liking and

Wolfzettel, ed. (Amsterdam 1995) 34-49, p. 43.

630Hemming, Jessica. 'I Could Love a Man with These Three Colours: Gazing and the Tricoloured Beloved,' CMCS 68 (2014) 51-68, p. 54.

631Thomson, *Owein*, p. 12. '...he could see through the join in the gate a street opposite him, and a row of houses on either side of the road. And he could see a maiden with yellow curly hair coming to the gate, and a band of gold on her head, and wearing a dress of yellow brocaded silk, with boots of speckled leather on her feet....' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 123.

632Fenster, Thelma, 'Why men?' *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994), xv-xxvi, p. xi.

his own advantage. Having chosen him, she refuses to shift her allegiance, even after he leaves for Arthur's court and never returns. Two other servants in the *iarlles's* palace imprison her in a stone vessel for her defence of him, which nearly costs her life, but even as she explains what has happened, she refers to Owein as 'genhyf mwyaf a garwn o'r holl vyt' (the friend that I loved best in the whole world).⁶³³ Leslie Ellen Jones offers up Luned's imprisonment, as well as Owein's being trapped within the gate, as examples of 'boxing episodes' like the ones featuring Lleu, Gorau and Taliesin, a proposal which goes some way to helping explain what is otherwise quite a strange encounter:

Ac val y bydei Owein y velly ef a glywei och wawr, a'r eil, a'r trydet, ac an agos attaw. A gofyn a oruc Owein ay dyn bydawl a'y gwnaei. 'Ie, ys gwir,' heb y dyn. 'Pwy wyt titheu?' heb yr Owein. 'Dioer,' heb hi, 'Lunet wyf i, llawvorwyn Iarlles y Ffynhawn.' 'Beth a wney di yna?' heb yr Owein. 'Vyg karcharu,' heb hi, 'o achaws gwraang a doeth o lys yr amherawdyr y uynny y iarllles yn priawt, ac a uu rynnawd gyt a hi. Ac yd aeth y dreglyaw llys Arthur, ac ny doeth vyth drachefyn. A'r kedymdeith oed ef genhyf i mwyhaf a garwn o'r holl vyt. Sef a oruc deu o weissyon ystauell y iarllles, y oganu ef y'm gwyd i, a'e alw yn dwyllwr bradwr. Sef y dywedeis inheu na allei eu deu gorff hwynt amrysson a'e vn gorff ef. Sef oed ynteu, Owein vab Uryen.' 'A oed diheu gehyt titheu,' heb yr ynteu, 'pei gwyppei y gwreanc hwnnw hynny y deihei efo y'th hamdiffyn di?' 'Diheu, y rof a Duw,' heb hi. A ffan uu digawn poeth y golwythyon, eu rannu a oruc Owein yn deu hanher y rydaw a'r vorwyn, a bwytta a orugant. A gwedy hynny ymdidan hyny uu dyd dranoeth..⁶³⁴

Here we have the mysterious crying that reveals the hiding place in other stories (not to mention previously in *Owein* itself, as his discovery of the lion goes much the same way; he hears a shrieking noise, follows it, and finds the lion trapped in the cleft of a stone). Jones notes that *llestyr*, the word for Luned's prison, is a peculiar one with a wide semantic range:

...its primary meaning is a vessel, such as a cup, dish, bottle, pan, pot, cask and in its early use also other receptacles such as chests, bags, or bushels; figuratively, especially in a Biblical context, it is a person who contains or receives some mental or spiritual quality, or the human body; a vessel in the

⁶³³Thomson, *Owein*, p. 25, Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 134.

⁶³⁴Thomson, *Owein* p. 25-26. 'And as Owein was [cooking chops on the fire] he heard a loud groaning, and a second, and a third, not far from him. And Owein asked whether it was a human being who was groaning. "Yes, indeed," said the creature. "Who are you?" asked Owein. "God knows," she said, "I am Luned, handmaiden to the Lady of the Well." "What are you doing there?" asked Owein. "I have been imprisoned," she said, "because of a young man who came from the emperor's court to claim the countess as his wife, and he was with her a short time. And he went to visit Arthur's court, but he never returned. And he was the friend I think I loved best in the whole world. Two of the countess's chamberlains made fun of him in front of me and called him a cheat and a traitor. And I said that the two of them together could not stand up to him alone. And because of that they imprisoned me in this stone vessel, and said that I would die unless he came to defend me, by a certain day. And that day is no later than the day after tomorrow, and I have no one to look for him. He was Owein son of Urien." "Are you sure," said Owein, "that if the young man knew this he would come to defend you?" "I am certain, between me and God," she said. And when the chops were cooked through, Owein divided them in half between himself and the maiden, and they ate. And after that they conversed until it was light the next day.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 134.

sense of ship or boat; a beehive, a tube or duct in the body, or a blood vessel: and a womb, uterus, or plant ovary. Thus, we could see her as being kept in a stone chest – much like Lleu or Goreu – a stone bag – a petrified version of Gwion/Taliesin's leather bag – or in a symbolic womb, which seems to be what all of these containers/prisons really represent.⁶³⁵

This makes it extremely difficult for the modern reader, if not also the contemporary audience, to picture the scene and precisely what occurs. In Chrétien's version, Lunete is imprisoned in a chapel by a spring. She is the one to hear Yvain bemoaning his fate, rather than the other way around. The two speak through a crack in the wall, there is a small competition over who is more distressed:

While he was lamenting in this fashion, a poor, sad prisoner who was locked within the chapel overheard this lament through a crack in the wall. As soon as Yvain had recovered from his faint, the prisoner called to him.
'Oh God!' she said. 'What do I see there? Who is lamenting so bitterly?'
'Who are you?' he inquired.
'I,' she said, 'am a prisoner, the saddest creature alive.'
'Hush, foolish creature!' he replied. 'Your grief is joy and your suffering bliss compared to those that I endure. The more a man has learned to live in happiness and joy, the more, compared to another man, does grief when he suffers it upset and destroy his senses. A weak man can carry a weight, when he is accustomed and used to it, that a stronger man could never manage to carry.'⁶³⁶

Finally, Lunete explains that she has been falsely accused of treason and is about to be executed, to which Yvain responds blithely that 'anyone can save you from death'.⁶³⁷ He reveals himself then promises to return and before riding off to seek shelter for the night, and although he extracts a promise from Lunete not to reveal his name to his opponents, both of them appear to be in on the secret and fully aware of the plan. The events are straightforward and in keeping with the romantic tradition of knights-errant rescuing damsels from their tormentors, and the background to Lunete's hunt for Yvain and subsequent imprisonment is given in some detail.

The Welsh story plays out rather differently. First, Owein does not exhibit the same emotional distress as Yvain, and rather than bemoaning the error of his ways in love, is calmly cooking dinner for himself and his lion companion.⁶³⁸ This is in apposition with the lack of emotional exposition in medieval Welsh tales in general; it appears the audiences were not

⁶³⁵Jones, 'Boys in Boxes' p. 222.

⁶³⁶Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*; William Kibler (trans), *Arthurian Romances* (London 1991) p. 339.

⁶³⁷*ibid.* p. 340.

⁶³⁸Not all versions of *Owein* contain the lion episode.

expecting their heroes to exhibit a deep inner life.⁶³⁹ Certainly none of the Welsh Arthurian texts indicate an interest on the part of their redactors in a masculine hero who pauses amidst the action to wail about his love life. The heroic-model warrior has been transplanted into the milieu of the chivalric romance only half-transformed, but has done so within the limits of the audience's horizon of expectations.

Luned is trapped within some kind of stone prison through which she and Owein can speak but not see, and through which he seems able to pass her food. There is also no obvious logic to the behaviour of the chamberboys and even less, in the metaphorical sense, of keeping her imprisoned: she is not released and adopted in the same way as the boys in their boxing episodes, nor is her position or identity significantly altered after the encounter. It is a frustrating aspect of the scene that Owein, in the face of Luned's declarations of undying loyalty and even while conversing and sharing his dinner with her, never identifies himself to her.

Nor does he attempt to rescue her yet, but wanders off with his lion to have another adventure with an earl whose sons are being threatened by a monster – he even asks her, within her stone prison, for directions to the nearest hospitable hall! When he does return and rescue her from the boys who are about to throw her on a fire,⁶⁴⁰ he does so without identifying himself, but says rather, 'Dioer...marchawc da oed hwnnw, a ryued oed gennyf i pei gwypei ef uot ar y uorwyn hynny na delei y hamdiffyn. A pheu mynnewch chwi vyui drostaw ef, miui a awn y chwi.'⁶⁴¹ The revealing of names can be an important part of battle scenes in both heroic and romantic tales, as can their concealment, and medieval and Classical literature are full of heroes who could have saved themselves some pain – and often the life of a friend or relative – by announcing their identities earlier on. Alternately, Owein may remain nameless here because he has not yet completely

⁶³⁹ Padel, Oliver. *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* 2nd ed. (Cardiff 2013) p. 32.

⁶⁴⁰ The attempted burning scene itself appears to me to be a sign this section, at the very least, was adapted directly from *Yvain*. Suggestions of ancient Celtic rituals aside, burning was not an established method of execution in Britain until the fifteenth century. Sayles, George O. 'King Richard II of England, A fresh look', *Proceedings, American Philosophical Society* 115:1 (1971) 28–32, p. 31.

⁶⁴¹ Thomson, *Owein*, p. 28. 'God knows...he was a good knight, and I would be surprised that he did not come to defend her if he knew the maiden needed him. And if you want me to take his place, then I will' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 136.

regained his lost masculine identity. He, rather than Luned, is the one who is made a whole man by the encounter, and after they return to the *iarlles's* court, neither of the women ever speak in the story again. All the tensions and troubled elements of the relationship between Owein and his wife are erased within a single sentence, as she returns with him to Arthur's court and the two of them stay there; this is still more amicable than in Chrétien's version in which Laudine has to be tricked into accepting him again. No resolution for the state of the *iarlles's* kingdom, which was clearly bound up in the health and fate of its rulers, is ever given, but rather, it seems to vanish once its usefulness to the narrative has concluded.

It has often been observed that the romances, while named for Arthur, do not actually focus on him; rather he provides the framework for the story of another knight's development.⁶⁴² Perhaps this is why Owein seems like a child at times, being led through the narrative by happenstance and luck, his actions directed by the people around him. In some ways it appears Owein is the object of the tale while Luned is its driving force, for out of all the main characters, she remains the only one who both has enough agency to control her own or anyone else's fate, and actually bothers to use it. Again and again we see that feminine power in medieval Welsh literature lies in speech — either magical in the casting of spells and *geasa*, or the more mortal ability to convince the people around her to act on her behalf — and this is Luned's method as well. Like Rhiannon in the First Branch this power eventually fails her, however, and she is incapacitated when removed from her Otherworldly home. Owein, in the end, is the only character who successfully traverses all the worlds — the domestic feminine, martial masculine, and feminine otherworld — and the man, whether by his own virtue or that of the women around him, is victorious.

Ystoria Gereint fab Erbin

The story of Gereint is found in three complete manuscripts and two further detached folios from a fourth. The complete tale is found in the fourteenth-century *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (Peniarth

642Padel, *AMWL*, p. 79.

4), that composite of so much medieval Welsh literature; a virtually identical version is found in the late-fourteenth-century *Llyfr Coch* (Jesus College 111).⁶⁴³ A version in Peniarth 6 part iv omits the gathering at the beginning, but there are no major differences in the narrative of any of these versions, suggesting that the text was already fairly stable by the time of its copying. Robert Thomson, and following him Roger Middleton, declines to attempt settling on a date, except to note that 'archaic spellings characteristic of the Black Book of Carmarthen' suggest that both these versions probably have a common ancestor in the thirteenth century.⁶⁴⁴ The tale itself, cognate as it clearly is with Chrétien's twelfth-century *Erec et Enide*, is older still.⁶⁴⁵ Like Owein and Peredur, the eponymous hero appears to be attested in earlier tradition, as a character by the same name appears in the Latin *vitae* of several Welsh saints, as a sixth century king of Dumnonia, as one of the doomed expedition to Catraeth in *Y Gododdin* and one of the Three Seafarers of Britain in the Triads. He gives his name as title to the long poem *Gereint filius Erbin*, which describes him as a warrior who fought at Llongborth, which may link him with the Myrddin material. However, the references to Gereint prior to 1300 make no mention of Enid, but belong to an independent native tradition. The only reference that may, it has been suggested, indicate her being part of the story is a single line in a poem by Prydydd y Moch about the '*llid*' or '*llidiawc*' (anger) of Gereint, but while this is indeed the word used to describe his treatment of her, it is also used frequently to describe ferocity in battle, an interpretation that in this case seems more likely.⁶⁴⁶

A case can be made, then, that this Gereint was not originally connected to the Enid story, but used later as a Welsh approximation of Erec. If this is true, then the derivation of the characters Erec and Enid from the Breton territorial names 'Bro Wened' and 'Bro Weroc', as argued by Rachel Bromwich, makes the ultimate theme of the tale,⁶⁴⁷ as Middleton observes, 'reminiscent of the Celtic

⁶⁴³Thomson, R. *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* (Dublin 1997) p. ix.

⁶⁴⁴Middleton, Roger. 'Chwedl Geraint ab Erbin,' *Arthur of the Welsh*, Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts, eds. (Cardiff 1991) 147-158, p. 147.

⁶⁴⁵Middleton, 'Geraint', p.147.

⁶⁴⁶*ibid.*

⁶⁴⁷Bromwich, Rachel. 'Celtic dynastic themes and the Breton lays', *Etudes Celtiques* 9 (1961): 439-71, pp. 464-66.

myth of Sovereignty, where a king marries a female goddess who personifies the kingdom'.⁶⁴⁸ Bromwich suggests that what appears to be relatively early language of the *Gereint filius Erbin* poem implies that the character of Gereint had already been drawn into the Arthurian orbit before 1100, which would provide an explanation for his supplanting the Breton-French hero Erec; the redactor may simply have preferred a familiar Welsh hero for his version of the story rather than a foreign one, or have chosen his hero from the genealogy or interests of a local ruling family.

If Enid is read as the personification of an area of Brittany, she would certainly fit the mould of the sovereignty-granting goddess; however the story does not require her to be so and while this remains a possible reading, we shall see that her function is actually far more mortal, bound up in the cultural expectation and performance of her husband's and her own respective roles. Gereint is already the heir to his father's kingdom, which he inherits and becomes ruler of fairly early in the story. Meanwhile Gwenhwyfar is a more active queen in *Gereint* than in other tales, and we see much more of her daily life. She oversleeps, goes hunting, and throws parties for the court — but she is very much acting the part of the mortal medieval queen and not of a euhemerised divine figure. By the late twelfth century, queens in Wales are seen in the *cyfreithiau llys*, the laws of the court, to hold increased importance. David Stephenson attributes this at least somewhat to the influence of English ladies who married Welsh princes: Dafydd ab Owain married Emma, the half-sister of King Henry II of England, and she is shown as acting independently or in equal concert with Dafydd in matters concerning England.⁶⁴⁹ Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's marriage to Joan, natural daughter of King John, in the early thirteenth century further strengthened the autonomy of Welsh queens. Somewhat later still, Senena, the wife of Gruffudd ab Llywelyn, was instrumental in negotiating her husband's release, and Eleanor de Montfort acted as mediator between her husband, Llywelyn ab Gruffudd, and her cousin, Edward I.⁶⁵⁰ Stephenson names several other native Welsh

648Middleton, 'Geraint,' p. 148.

649Stephenson, David. 'The laws of the court: past reality or present ideal?' *The Welsh King and His Court*. T.M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen and Paul Russell, eds. (Cardiff 2000) 400-414 p. 402.

650*ibid.*

consorts taking an active role in the ruling of their lands, whose participation in lordship does not incite all the tension that foreign-born queens might have provoked by interfering too eagerly in their Welsh husbands' affairs, and Robin Chapman Stacey, noting an increase in the members and status of the queen's household in the Iorwerth redaction, argues convincingly for Joan's influence on its revision.⁶⁵¹ But even Joan's expanded household is linked firmly with the chamber, rather than the court, and despite Gwenhwyfar's lively vibrancy, in practice she shows little agency or desire of her own.⁶⁵² This is especially noticeable when she is placed alongside, for example, the native Welsh heroines of the Four Branches.⁶⁵³ Twice in the text she is 'given permission' to watch the men hunt, and upon waking, directs her maiden to the stable to prepare 'uo o uarch o'r a wedo y wraged eu marchogaeth' ('all the horses suitable for women to ride').⁶⁵⁴ It is difficult to envision Rhiannon of the First Branch, for instance, either asking permission of her husband or worrying about which horse she might take.

Like Arthur, and as his counterpart, she is responsible for the safety and the honour of those under her protection. The offence that sends Gereint on his initial quest, and the *sarhaed* Edern is required to pay, is clearly more in relation to the status of the queen than that of the handmaiden. While in Chrétien's story the maiden too is described as not only a noblewoman herself but as 'the daughter of a king', her exact position is left unsaid in the Welsh text; it is enough for the audience that as the girl is under Gwenhwyfar's protection, any insult visited on her extends to the queen as well, and by extension, to Arthur himself. To insult or harm a woman, in medieval Wales, was to attack by proxy her husband and all her male kin, as the action implies them to be incapable of properly defending her. Therefore, to attack the queen's handmaiden is to attack the queen, which in turn is to attack the king, who may then claim a significant amount of redress from the perpetrator;

651 Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'King, queen and *edling* in the laws of the court,' *The Welsh King and his Court*, Thomas Charles-Edwards, Morfydd Owen and Paul Russell, eds. The Welsh King and his Court (Cardiff: UWP 2000) 15-62, pp. 55-57.

652 *ibid.* p. 57.

653 Even placed alongside her own counterpart in the French romances, Gwenhwyfar of the *rhamantau* pales; the ill-fated and irresistible love for Lancelot that brings her to life in *Charette*, for instance, is nowhere to be seen.

654 Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 3. Davies, *Mabinogion*, pp. 140-141.

perhaps the most drastic action Gwenhwyfar takes in the text of *Gereint* is to forgive Edern once he is in her power.⁶⁵⁵

Questions of identity are at the forefront of the encounter with the dwarf and the armed knight, beginning with Gwenhwyfar's questioning Gereint if he knows who they are. It is hardly unreasonable for a queen in her own land to want more information on strangers traversing it, in order to assess any threat they may pose as well as the appropriate conduct with which to greet them. The initial meeting is mediated between agents of each party – the queen and the strange knight – and the dwarf, as a disruptive figure, refuses to abide by the accepted social policy. The second attempt at mediation results in confrontation between Gereint – an unarmoured knight – and the dwarf, a servant. The latter tells Gereint that 'nyd vyt un an rydet di ac y dylyhych ymdidan a'm arglwyd i', which the reader understands as incorrect but which Gereint, at that moment, is unable to reliably dispute.⁶⁵⁶ As discussed above regarding Owein, a knight's warrior identity can be seen to depend on the tools of his trade – armour, horse, and sword – and without them, he can lay no claim to an innate courtly masculinity.⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, Fulton notes that Gereint's description marks him out as a youth, an unfinished man, 'noble but not a warrior, effeminate rather than aggressive':⁶⁵⁸

Ac ydrych a orugant draekeuyn, ac vynt a welynt uarchawc ar ebawluarch helyglei athrugar y ueint, a maccwyf gwineu ieuanc eskeirnoyth teyrneid arnaw, a chledyf eurdwrn ar y glun, a pheis a swrcot o bali ymdanaw, a dwy eskid issel o gordwal am y drayd, a llen o borfor glas ar warthaf hynny, ac aual eur vrth pob cwrr idi.⁶⁵⁹

Gereint is placed here, like Owein in his portcullis, as the object of another person's gaze. This, as well as his attire and youthful appearance, serve to feminise him and force him into a situation

655The idea of Gwenhwyfar as mediator of forgiveness and punishment recurs in other medieval texts, especially famously in the tale told by Chaucer's Wife of Bath. In that Arthurian tale-within-a-tale, a knight is put under *geas* by the queen for raping a young woman, charged with discovering 'what women most desire.' Education and rehabilitation, in that version of the 'loathely lady' tale, are privileged over punishment, and when the knight learns to understand womankind, he is not only forgiven but rewarded.

656Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 5. 'Your status is not high enough to entitle you to speak with my lord.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 142.

657Lurkhur, Karen, 'Body and Identity' p. 102.

658 Fulton, H. 'Gender and jealousy in *Gereint uab Erbin* and *Le Roman de Silence*', *Arthuriana* 24:2 (43-70) p. 50.

659 Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 4. 'They looked behind them and could see a rider on a willow-grey colt, enormous in size, a young, auburn-haired, bare-legged, noble squire with a gold-hilted sword on his thigh, wearing a tunic and surcoat of brocaded silk with two low boots of Cordovan leather on his feet, and a mantle of blue purple over that with a golden apple in each corner.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 141.

where he must defend his own masculinity. Brocaded silk ('bali') and Cordovan leather ('issel o gordwal') are used frequently in descriptions of clothing to indicate nobility and wealth. The text of *Owein* applies it to the Gŵr Melyn, the maidens who occupy his castle, and Luned as she approaches the gate. The old woman sitting with Enid when Gereint first meets her wears 'hen dillat atueiledic o bali' ('old, shabby clothes of brocaded silk'), indicating the family's prior status and their fallen fortunes.⁶⁶⁰ It is not, however, attached to martial aggression or warrior status. The language used to describe the silent knight and his lady demonstrates the difference:

Ac yn agos y'r corr y gwelynt wreic y ar uarch canwelw telediw a phedestric wastadualch ganthaw;
ac eurwisc o bali amdaneî. Ac yn agos iti hitheu marchawc y ar caduarch mawr tomlyd, ac arueu
trwm gloyw ymdanaw acam y uarch. A diheu oyd ganthunt na welsynt eiroed gwr a march ac arueu
hoffach ganthunt eu meint no vynt....⁶⁶¹

It is the 'arueu trwm gloyw' ('heavy, shining armour') that serves as evidence of the knight's masculine aggression, a symbol of warfare incorporated into the presentation of his physical self and placed clearly in contrast to his female companion. Meanwhile Gereint, unarmoured and on a borrowed horse, is not able to assert his own masculine warrior credentials to the dwarf and his companions, and is forced to leave the strangers alone for a time as the knight 'could take him cheaply'.⁶⁶² While the queen assures him he acted wisely, he insists on rectifying the situation and reclaiming his warrior identity as soon as possible: 'Arglwydes,' heb ef, 'myui ettwa a af yn y ol, gan dy gennat ti; ac ef a daw yn y diwed y gyuanhed y caffwyf i arueu, ae eu benfic ae ar wystel, ual y caffwyf ymbrawf a'r marchawc.'⁶⁶³

However, it may be argued that the Gereint whom the Queen and her lady witness, the Gereint who sleeps late and wears fine clothes and must have the effeminacy, as Fulton observes, 'literally beaten out of him' over the course of the narrative, is in fact the 'true' Gereint.⁶⁶⁴ Marcelle

⁶⁶⁰Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 7. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 144.

⁶⁶¹ *ibid* p. 142.

⁶⁶²Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 4-5. 'Near the dwarf they could see a woman on a horse, pale-white and handsome with pace smooth and stately, and she was dressed in a golden garment of brocaded silk. And close to her a knight on a great, muddy charger, with heavy, shining armour on him and his horse. And they were sure they had never seen a man and horse and armour whose size impressed them more....' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 143.

⁶⁶³Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 6. "Lady," he said, "I shall go after him again, with your permission, and he will come eventually to a place that is inhabited, where I shall find armour, either on loan or in exchange for surety, so that I shall get the opportunity to test myself against the knight." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 143.

⁶⁶⁴ Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy', p. 54.

Thiébaux, in her study of stag hunts in medieval literature, notes of Sir Gawain – another text in which hunting plays a vital role – that before his adventures properly commence, the hero's authentic self is hidden behind the external signs of his knighthood, and that 'all his accoutrements obscure that secret man from our full view'.⁶⁶⁵ Both literally and figuratively, the armour hides the man inside it. Gereint, by contrast, is shown here at his most vulnerable and with his external social identity compromised; what he achieves over the course of the text is a sublimation of his private self to his public social one. Of the three *rhamantau*, *Gereint* is the only one that makes uncompromised use of the female gaze, first here and later when Enid sees her sleeping husband in their bedchamber. In both cases only Gereint himself is positioned as the object on view, and in both cases the women's gaze results in a challenge to his masculinity. Whether the actual emasculation occurs as a result of the gaze itself, or from being momentarily positioned as object rather than subject, or only because the women of the tale are able to see through the externally-presented identity is unclear; all three separately or in combination are certainly possible.

The case of mistaken identity, in which the dwarf and his companions mistook the status of the queen, her lady, and one of Arthur's knights, cannot simply be let go, but Gereint's own personal stake is fronted as his motivation. Lurkhur suggests that injury against men in romance is 'symbolic of relations of dominance and authority' and presented as publicly meaningful while violence against women often takes place behind closed doors.⁶⁶⁶ In this case, although the only audience to the encounter has been the queen and her handmaiden, Gereint's masculine identity is already called into question by his oversleeping and missing the hunt. Therefore the strike by the dwarf, happening as it does outdoors – the appropriate venue for masculine martial endeavour – but unwitnessed by anyone but the women, can be seen as both public judgement of Gereint's manhood, and a private encounter, conveying the text's anxiety over his performance of masculine identity. This fluidity

⁶⁶⁵ Thiébaux, Marcelle. *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca and London, 1974), p. 72.

⁶⁶⁶ Lurkhur, 'Body and Identity', p. 103. This is not always true even of French romance, and Lurkhur notes several exceptions. Violence done to women in the *rhamantau* is as likely to be public, as it must be witnessed by the social group in order to be effective.

between exterior and interior space is further in apposition with Susan Crane's contention that the removal of male characters into an unfamiliar external space allows them to take on a feminine role, the objects rather than agents of change, without losing or diluting the masculine aspects of their identities.⁶⁶⁷ As we shall see, however, the same principle can be applied to female characters, who are able to use an anonymised, outsider status to transgress gender boundaries and construct for themselves a new hybrid identity.

The hunt for the white stag, which occupies the other characters while Gereint and the queen are riding, presents a particularly complex and puzzling analysis. The expectation, when hunts appear in such a story, is that the hero of the tale will be the one to prove himself in a pseudo-warlike affair predicated on the ideas of martial display and masculine competition. Rachel Bromwich maintains that this section, along with the lady with the *addanc* in *Peredur*, is a relic from a more ancient Celtic sovereignty tradition that survived the transfer to French through the early Breton lays and Chrétien's *Erec*.⁶⁶⁸ Like many other suppositions about early Celtic sources for medieval material, Bromwich's proposal is dependent on the assumption of shared motifs in Welsh and in Irish, as all of the early texts she refers to are Irish mythological sovereignty tales. Furthermore, hunting tales – including hunts instigated by goddesses for purposes of their own – are hardly unheard-of outside Celtic literatures; the chief difference appears in the bestowal of kingship at the end of the tale. Artemis, for instance, was known to frequently instigate hunts in classical Greek tales, but she was more likely to send the hunters to their deaths than to make kings of them.⁶⁶⁹ Hunting scenes not directly related to sovereignty abound in western medieval literatures, from romance to hagiography, for a wide variety of purposes. While the hunt with the white deer, as an attested Celtic (or at least Irish) symbolic animal, can reasonably be seen to represent or at least imply sovereignty, this is not, in fact, what the hunt in *Gereint* does.⁶⁷⁰ Gereint does not gain a

667Crane, Susan. *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Princeton 1994), p. 191.

668Bromwich, Rachel. 'Celtic dynastic themes', pp. 439-61.

669Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, p. 59.

670 The white animal hunt is discussed thoroughly by Bromwich in 'Celtic sovereignty and Breton lays'. White animals as supernatural creatures are well-attested in Welsh literature and folklore.

kingdom at the end of it, because he was his father's heir already. He does not even bring down the quarry himself, since he completely fails to participate in the hunt by sleeping through it. Thiébaux divides hunting narratives into four types: the sacred chase, which culminates in an encounter with a divine figure and effects conversion; the mortal chase, which acts as a conductor between life and death; the instructive chase, which guides the hero from ignorance to knowledge or self-knowledge; and the amatory chase, which drives the protagonist, whether hunter or hunted, to passionate love.⁶⁷¹ The types are non-exclusive and may be combined into whatever variant form suits the needs of the narrative, but in *Gereint*, the hunt falls just short of fitting into any of these patterns. Indeed, it is difficult to categorise hunts in medieval Welsh material in this way at all. A sovereignty hunt such as examined by Bromwich might fall into the category of 'sacred', but what of the pursuit of the Twrch Trwyth in *Culhwch*? It is amatory only in that it comprises part of a series of obstacles between the hero and his intended, is certainly neither instructional nor sacred, and can only be considered mortal in that it kills off a number of supporting characters. The protagonist, and Arthur himself, remain unaffected – and in this way the hunts in *Gereint* and *Culhwch* are remarkably similar. They defy easy categorisation, make for good adventure, and help to impel the plot, but effect no significant change on the hero himself.

What missing the hunt does accomplish in *Gereint* is to destabilise the protagonist's masculine identity, thereby effecting the effeminate presentation of him discussed above. Hunting was presented as being at odds with sloth and idleness from early days, as it necessitated rising early to take part in a martial and athletic pursuit, and to spend overlong relaxing in bed was both feminising and dangerously uxorious.⁶⁷² That Gereint oversleeps long enough that his only companions are women does not serve him well in his standing within the masculine social order of the court.

A notable difference between the hunt in *Gereint* and that in Chrétien's *Erec* is that the latter

⁶⁷¹ Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, p. 58.

⁶⁷² *ibid.* p. 77.

does not make use of the stag's head itself as a trophy, but rather, the hunter who brings down the white stag will have the chance to kiss 'the fairest maiden at the court'.⁶⁷³ The end objective is the same: whether the woman in question is presented with a knight's kiss or a stag's head, she is marked out as the fairest of the court and her status within the social group rises accordingly. Late medieval hunting manuals suggest that the symbolic prize was often actually the right foot, 'severed and presented...to the king or highest ranking person, perhaps to a lady to be complimented by "honours of the foot"' though which specific body parts and cuts of meat were associated as high-status markers appears to have shifted through time and location.⁶⁷⁴ The confirmation of the lady's status remains secondary, however, to that of the man in question, who will have proven his martial ability and thus gained the right to be named arbiter of female desirability. This, again, provides an example of how the hero's relationship with the feminine is crucial to his warrior identity. While the rules state that the best hunter will win the stag's head 'for his lady', the actual mechanics of it provide young warriors with an opportunity to show off their prowess in front of their peers as well as their lord, positioning themselves for favours and renown within their social group. It also runs up against a common dilemma in Arthurian tales: that even the hero is not to best Arthur himself. This narrative necessity prohibits Gereint or any of the other companions from being the victor in the hunt, but in this case, the protagonist really has no right to the victory at all, and will depend on Enid's status and beauty to acquire it for him. Thiébaux asserts that the end of the hunt marks

a turning point in the context [which] propelled the adventure to one of its possible conclusions. The hero triumphs; he captures, perhaps slays the animal, and is permitted to return with his spoils, perhaps to be established or re-confirmed within an order of his society. By his own act he has achieved a moral or practical victory and this completed his passage to a new condition.⁶⁷⁵

But Gereint has not done any of this 'by his own hand,' at least not as involves the hunt for

⁶⁷³Thomson, *Gereint*, xxvi. Fulton has suggested this difference is because kissing was a far more dangerous act in medieval Wales, and for a woman to kiss a man who was not her husband merited a *sarhaed*. See Fulton, 'A woman's place: Guinevere in the Welsh and French romances,' *Quondam et Futurus* 3:2 (1993) 1-25 p. 14, and R.R. Davies, 'The status of women and the practice of marriage in late-medieval Wales,' *The Welsh Law of Women*. Dafydd Jenkins, Morfydd E. Owen, and D.A. Binchy. eds. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980) 93-114, p. 106.

⁶⁷⁴For the 'honours of the foot': Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, p. 36. For the relative status of deer body parts: Naomi Sykes, 'The Rhetoric of Meat Apportionment Evidence for Exclusion, Inclusion and Social Position in Medieval England'. Paper given at Oxford Medieval Graduate Conference, 2012.

⁶⁷⁵Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, p. 57.

the white stag itself. He has, at least, been successful in defeating the Knight of the Sparrowhawk and obtaining justice for the Queen. Much as in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where the heroes even went to some length to acquire a legendary huntsman to help them, the actual victory is won by Arthur and Cafall:

Llyma weithon ual yd hellawd Arthur y carw: rannu yr erhyluae o'r gwyr a'r cwn, ac ellwg y cwn arnaw a orugant. A diwethaf ki a elygvyd arnaw annwyl gi Arthur, Cauall oed y enw. Ac adaw ur holl gwn a oruc, a rodi ystum y'r carw. Ac ar yr eil ystum y doeth yr carw y erhylua Arthur, ac Arthur a ymgauas ac ef, a chyn kyflauanu o neb arnaw, neu ry daroed y Arthur lad y benn. Ac yn canu corn llad a wnaethpwyd, ac yn dyuot a orugant pawb y gyt.⁶⁷⁶

From the conflict that Arthur's success provokes over how to award the prize, it seems both his victory, and his refraining from keeping the prize for himself, are the expected outcome. One can assume the winner would normally be expected to present the prize to his own lady, and Arthur could quite reasonably simply give the head, and the title of fairest, to his queen. But both he and Gwenhwyfar seem to agree not to, but rather to award it to another woman. This seems less to do with any instability in Gwenhwyfar's role as queen or Arthur's wife, but rather with the two of them behaving, as they tend to in the *rhamantau*, as parental figures to the younger knights. Having achieved the highest possible status, they are content now to help others up the social ladder. Furthermore, this appears to be assumed on the part of the others, as the journey back to the court is marked by myriad competing claims and 'ffawb o'r teulu a'r marchogyon yn amrysson yn chwerw am y penn' ('each one of the retinue and the knights quarrelling bitterly over the head') despite the fact none of them can claim to be the winner of the contest.⁶⁷⁷

In medieval stories outside Wales, the king need not necessarily also be the best warrior. At the beginning of the Anglo-Norman *Roman de Silence*, King Ebayn is shown as a coward as well as something of a brute, and it is only the courage of one of his young warriors that saves his kingdom, an act which the king seems to feel no shame in rewarding handsomely.⁶⁷⁸ Kings also depend on

⁶⁷⁶Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 14. 'Now this is how Arthur hunted the stag: they assigned the hunting stations to the men and the dogs and unleashed the dogs on the stag; and the last dog that was unleashed on it was Arthur's favourite dog—Cafall was his name. He left all the other dogs behind and caused the stag to turn. On the second turn the stag came to Arthur's hunting station, and Arthur set upon it, and before anyone could kill it Arthur had cut off its head. Then the horn was sounded announcing the kill, and then they all gathered together.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 150.

⁶⁷⁷Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 14. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 150.

⁶⁷⁸That warrior is Cador, earl of Cornwall, who also appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth as an older man and one of

wandering heroes in *Sir Beves of Hampton* or the stories of St. George and even *Beowulf*. The Welsh Arthur, as has been shown in previous chapters, is made in the model of heroic British kings, able to slay nearly a thousand enemies with the strength of his own sword, ultimately and sometimes single-handedly responsible for the salvation and safety of his own kingdom.⁶⁷⁹ This is overwhelmingly, but not universally, true of the Arthurian tradition. The Latin romances *De Ortu Waluuanii Neposit Arturi* ('The Rise of Gawain, nephew of Arthur') and *Historia Meriadoci* ('History of Meriadoc') both feature an Arthur who depends on the eponymous hero to settle disputes, as well as a scene in *De Ortu Waluuanii* in which Gawain pushes Arthur into the river Usk.⁶⁸⁰ As both of these stories come from a single author, however, they cannot be considered representative of a particular Arthurian tradition.⁶⁸¹ (The thirteenth-century romance of *Yder* also contains a hero who saves Arthur's life. Norris Lacy calls *Yder* 'an anomalous romance' because of its exaggeration of Arthur's wicked qualities and breaks from the traditional Arthurian romantic corpus,⁶⁸² and Keith Busby goes so far as to call it an 'anti-Arthurian romance', so the portrayal of Arthur is clearly at odds with the generally accepted model.)⁶⁸³

Whatever the origins of Chrétien's *Erec*, both it and *Gereint* are ultimately rooted in the socio-political realities of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. In some ways the knights and ladies of *Gereint* have more in common with chivalric Frenchmen than with the heroic men of the old Welsh north, or for that matter with early Brittany. However, even in the Middle Ages the Arthurian stories were placed in a distant and idealised history,⁶⁸⁴ and Marged Haycock and others

Arthur's advisors. The Cador in *Silence* is much younger, a descendant of Igraine's first husband Gorlois, and the Arthurian court is considered distant history in the text.

679 Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, trans. John Morris (London and Chichester 1980) p. 35.

680 Leake Day, Mildred. 'The rise of Gawain, nephew of Arthur', in Wilhelm, James J., *The Romance of Arthur* (New York 1994) pp. 383–386.

681 The author, who signed his work as 'R', has been suggested as Robert of Torigni or Randulf Higden. See Mildred Leake Day's 'The Rise of Gawain' in *The Romance of Arthur* and Larkin, Peter, 'A Suggested Author for "De ortu Waluuanii" and "Historia Meriadoci": Ranulph Higden', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 215–231.

682 Lacy, Norris J. 'Arthur's Character and Reputation in *Yder*', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales*, 14 (2007) p. 41–48.

683 'Yder', in N.J. Lacy, ed., *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, 1991, p. 529. Coincidentally, Yder is the name given to Edern ap Nudd, the knight of the sparrowhawk, in Chrétien's *Erec*.

684 Gilbert, Jane. 'Arthurian ethics', *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge, 2009) 154–170, p. 155.

have shown that for the Welsh, that history was often the Old North.⁶⁸⁵ The '*twrneimeint*' in which the characters spend so much time were not a significant part of the medieval Welsh cultural consciousness, but rather a Norman-French import, and an important aspect of continental chivalric masculinity. The text portrays a version of twelfth-century Europe taken almost directly from the literature of the Courts of Love, but while Gereint appears to ascribe to it, not everyone does; neither the court of Arthur nor that of Gereint's father Erbin consider jousting a real use of a true leader's time. In an era marked by constant struggles between the Welsh kingdoms and with an increasingly expansionist England, warfare in Wales was more of a lifestyle than a chivalric endeavour. Helen Roberts has observed that in medieval Wales, 'the status of a *marchog* (knight) was explicitly connected with ascension to rule over lands and not based on an abstract chivalric code'.⁶⁸⁶ Gereint's duties, therefore, are explicit and codified, and his participation in non-native customs has been the basis for the construction of a masculine identity outside the accepted role of his homeland. His father tells him, via the messenger that summons him from Arthur's court, '*y may idaw bod yn well itaw treulaw blodeu y ieuengtut a'e dewred yn kynhal y deruyneu e hun noc yn torneimeint diffwrth, kydd caffo clod yndunt*'.⁶⁸⁷ This is not the only place in the corpus of Welsh medieval literature to express a certain disapproval of tournament-fighting. The father of the eponymous hero of *Peredur* is said to sustain himself and his family by '*twrneimeint ac ymladeu a ryuelod*' ('tournaments and battles and wars')⁶⁸⁸ which, Roberts suggests, does not specifically condemn the practice, but relegates it to a secondary place in relation to the proper, official role of a ruler.⁶⁸⁹

In the tournament in which Gereint first meets Enid, he is nearly prohibited from taking part because he has no lady to champion. This is a clear and explicit example of the importance of the

685 Haycock, Marged. 'Early Welsh Poets Look North,' *Beyond the Gododdin* (St Andrews, 2013) 7-39, p. 13.

686 Roberts, Helen. 'Court and *cyfoeth*: Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* and the Middle Welsh *Gereint*', *Arthurian Literature* 21 (2004) 53-72 p. 63.

687 Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 20. "...that it is better for him to spend the flower of his youth and his prime defending his own boundaries than in unprofitable tournaments, though he is gaining renown in them.' Davies p. 154.

688 Goetinck, Glenys. *Historia Peredur van Efrog: Golygydd gyda Rhagymadrodd Nodiadau Testunol a Geirfa* (Cardiff 1976) p. 7, Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 65.

689 Roberts, Helen, 'Court and *cyfoeth*', p. 64.

female within the romance genre, as the hero's martial identity hinges on his relationship with a woman. He cannot take part in the masculine discourse of the battlefield unless he also locates himself within an appropriate relative space to the feminine. He chooses Enid because she is convenient, the daughter of his host, with no emotional aspects presented in the narrative; it is not significantly different from his also borrowing from his host the armour in which to fight. Both lady and armour are required for participation in the tournament, and both integral to the warrior's identity – for now, for Gereint, that identity is one he has not fully claimed and so can only borrow. Fulton observes that because daughters in Wales did not inherit land but all a nobleman's sons did, the French dilemma of landless younger sons seeking their fortunes was superfluous in the Welsh stories.⁶⁹⁰ However, in both versions the family is noble but poverty-stricken; the French Enide can give Erec little tangible benefit in terms of land. It is her nobility he needs. For Gereint, who is already on track to inherit his own kingdom, financial incentives, as well as love, are less important than honour. He needs to be attached to a lady of suitably noble birth to legitimise his participation in the tournament and be afforded a chance to prove his martial prowess against male opponents.

Gereint wins the fight, apparently successfully reclaiming his own warrior identity and obtaining justice for Gwenhwyfar and her handmaiden. His opponent, Edern ap Nudd, is sent back to Caerleon to make amends, telling the queen that Gereint put on him '[c]ymellyat cadarn drut gwrawl milwryeid' ('a firm, bold, brave, warrior-like compulsion') to present himself at the court of Arthur for judgement.⁶⁹¹ Throughout the *rhamantau*, warriors are able to require similar things of each other – Peredur spends the better part of his story knocking other knights off their horses and sending them to Arthur – and seems to suggest both an honour system in which everyone agrees to play by the rules, and a power exuded by masculine prowess that forces obedience.

Gereint and Enid plan to marry, once they return to Arthur's court so he and Gwenhwyfar can once again act *in loco parentis* and give the bride away. This was likely of some relief to her

⁶⁹⁰Fulton, 'Individual and society' p. 34.

⁶⁹¹Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 15. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 151.

noble but impoverished father: with Arthur and the queen acting as *rhoddiaid* they would also take on the responsibilities of the fees and contracts associated with marriage, such as the *amobr*, a fee to the bride's liege lord for releasing her and the *cowyll*, the virginity price.⁶⁹² The idea of the lord and lady acting in a parental role, as fictive kin, is common to much of medieval Europe, especially in the cases of younger relatives who would often have been fostered from childhood.⁶⁹³

In the end, Arthur and Gwenhwyfar not only give away the bride, provide the wedding clothes and feast, and see the ceremony performed, but have the bridal bed put in their own chamber, acting simultaneously as parents and chaperones, though if this close proximity to their patrons inhibits the couple's consummation of their marriage, it is a detail the author leaves out. Arthur even takes the place of the priest, as for all the mention of churches and holy days in *Gereint*, the ceremony is never explicitly Christian, but rather, 'a'r rwym a wneid yna rwg deuddyn' ('the bond that was made at that time between a couple'), carefully avoiding use of the words 'marriage' and 'wedding'.⁶⁹⁴ This the text has in common with the *Four Branches* or *Culhwch ac Olwen* — fitting, considering that like Rhiannon and Branwen, Enid spends the first part of her marriage building her reputation before any trouble strikes.

After the wedding is the first time in the text that Enid is referred to by name. Previously called only '*y forwyn*' for the entirety of her and Gereint's acquaintance, it is only upon her marriage and official acceptance into the court — as Bolduc says, she 'enters into a sanctioned heterosexual union' — that she assumes her own identity.⁶⁹⁵ Like her husband, her status must be bestowed upon her by the Queen, and only after receiving the mark of royal favour is Enid able to mediate Gereint's identity.

The gifting of the white stag's head, as well as the clothing given her by Gwenhwyfar, is a

⁶⁹²Jenkins, D and Morfydd Owen, eds. *The Welsh law of women* (Cardiff 1980) pp 190, 196.

⁶⁹³Beverley Smith, Llinos, 'Fosterage, adoption and god-parenthood: Ritual and fictive kinship in medieval Wales', *Welsh History Review* 16:1 (1992) 1-35. For more discussion of medieval fosterage see the chapter on *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

⁶⁹⁴Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 96, Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 153.

⁶⁹⁵Bolduc, Michelle. 'Images of romance: The Miniatures of "Le Roman de Silence"', *Arthuriana* 12 (2002) 101-112, p. 102.

clear symbolic gesture welcoming her into the court and placing her visibly amongst the Queen's favourites; bestowing honour on the lady to reflect upon the knight comes from the chivalric tradition in which ladies provide the focus for homosocial competition between men. At this point, Enid's 'lluossogi y chlod, a'e chydymdeithon o hynny yn uwy no chynt' ('reputation increased, and...she had more companions than before').⁶⁹⁶ This is reminiscent of the first year of Branwen's marriage to Matholwch in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, in which she spends the first year giving out rich presents and 'hwyl delediw a duc hi o glot a chedymdeithon' ('flourished in honour and companions').⁶⁹⁷ Like Branwen, though for different reasons, the second year of Enid's marriage is overcome with strife and her popularity in her husband's kingdom wanes. While recurrent in Welsh and Irish texts it is by no means a particularly Celtic phenomenon. Women as failed peaceweavers or unwelcome interlopers exist in literature from at least Medea onward, and the French historian Georges Duby has found that in twelfth-century France as well 'the bride who became part of the household...always remained an intruder, the object of tenacious distrust.'⁶⁹⁸ It seems inevitable that his failings, whatever they proved to be, would be laid at her feet.

At first, things appear to be going well for Gereint as well. He has taken over the strongly masculine and lordly task of riding circuit around his realm, now that his father is incapacitated by age. Ruling and warfare are a young man's game, and Erbin is ready to retire and abdicate his throne in favour of his more virile son. Old age is an emasculating for a warrior, as physical prowess necessarily decreases, but unlike other old or infirm kings, such as Uther in the *Historia*, Erbin is prepared to sacrifice influence for a peaceful retirement rather than die in battle. This may demonstrate influence by the customs of the Capetian and Norman kings, who were prepared to pass the crown onto their sons before death to insure a smooth succession, or may simply be that in the world of *Gereint*, real battles are few and far between.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁶Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 19. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p.154.

⁶⁹⁷Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 27.

⁶⁹⁸ Duby, Georges. *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Foster (Baltimore 1991) p. 5-6. This is taken up regarding Heledd in Welsh literature by Jenny Rowland, *EWSP*, pp. 142-43.

⁶⁹⁹Here also is shown the constant alterations to his family tree to make Arthur related to everyone in Wales as required. Gereint is said to be Arthur's cousin, by his father Erbin ab Custennin. It is surely best not to attempt to

Gereint, however, is not eager to become a ruler. Unlike Chrétien's Erec, he leaves Arthur's court and takes up the mantle of lordship only unwillingly. He tells his father, 'if it were my choice, you would not be placing control of your kingdom into my hands at the moment', and indicates he would preferred to have stayed in Arthur's court with his companions.⁷⁰⁰ This may be the first indication of trouble to come, and that he may not in fact be ready to completely assume the responsibilities of a noble adult male. Although Thomson suggests that it should be read not as Gereint's unwillingness, but as an expression of sympathy or regret that his father's situation requires his abdication, in light of the lengths he must eventually go to in order to prove himself fit to rule, it may also be taken at face value.⁷⁰¹ Fulton notes that his coming-of-age rituals are 'in fact over-determined, suggesting an uneasiness about his social identity as a ruler' and suggests that for all the attention paid in the text to telling of Gereint's obvious fitness to rule, what it actually shows is another matter.⁷⁰² His assumption of the rule of the kingdom follows the expected formula of feasting and gift-giving, but with variations that mean all the most important functions are actually fulfilled by someone else. Gwalchmai is there to remind him of his responsibilities, and his personal involvement in the gifting is limited:

A theulu Arthur a dechreuwys roti. Ac yn y lle y doeth gwyr Kernyw ac y rodassant vynteu; ac ny bu hir u buont yn roti rac meint brys pawb onadunt y roti. Ac o'r a doeth y erchi da yno nyt aeth neb ymdeith odynd namyn gan y uod.⁷⁰³

It is the retinues establishing loyalty to each other, rather than the forging of a bond between a lord and his men, though again, Thomson suggests a more charitable reading: 'That Gereint was assisted by his friends from court in defraying the expense of this generosity presumably underlines

reconcile the family trees in Gereint with those in Culhwch ac Olwen – but doing so would require Custennin, the giant shepherd of Culhwch, to have had another surviving son after the death of Ysbaddaden. His son Gorau, however, is still a squire in *Gereint*, while Erbin is an old man. How old, then, is Arthur? And does living in Caerleon confer immortality? Of course, the idea is to make Gereint a cousin of Arthur, and to match it with the genealogy of old kings of Dumnonia, rather than to arrange literary consistency, but demonstrates the unreliable nature of many of the genealogies and the dangers of attempting to read them as real historical accounts.

700 Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 156.

701 Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 101.

702 Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' p. 49.

703 Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 23. '...Arthur's retinue began to give gifts. And immediately the men of Cornwall came and they too gave. And none of them gave for long, such was the haste of each one of them to give. Of those who came there to ask for gifts, not one left there without getting what he wanted.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 156.

the regard and affection in which they held him.⁷⁰⁴ Even if this is the case, it may augment their feelings of betrayal when he eventually abandons the pleasures of the court for those of the bedchamber.

Gereint's reluctance to rule alone continues, when the men who accompanied him from Arthur's court relay their intention to return. He asks them to wait until everyone who is going to pay homage to him has; they do, and even on parting, a duke of Burgundy tells him what the next step in his rulership should be. He follows it, but then returns to his old ways:

Ac ual y gnotayssei tra uu yn llys Arthur, kyrchu torneimeint a wnaey, ac ymwybot a'r gwyr dewraf a chadarnaf, yny oed gloduawr yn y gyueir honno ual y lle y buassei gynt, ac yny gyuoethoges y lys a'e gydymdeithon a'e vyrda o'r meirch goreu a'r arueu goreu ac o'r eurdlysseu arbennicaf a goreu.⁷⁰⁵

This is a shift in the portrayal of martial masculinity with which the text and its characters seem entirely uncomfortable. Certainly Gereint is fulfilling his role as a heroic lord, but doing so in a chivalric manner – through tournaments and ritualised fighting, rather than raiding parties and warfare. He is still able to be generous to his people, and he still brings renown to his name, but in changing the context, his masculine performance is subtly undermined in the eyes of his own *teulu* and perhaps of a native audience. Fulton suggests that 'the disparaging references to "tournaments" indicates a concern that newfangled French habits introduced into the households of provincial princes might distract the *uchelwyr* from their patrimonial duties', and that seeking out such personal honours, over those of the collective *teulu*, are inappropriate for the heir of a Welsh kingdom.⁷⁰⁶ While the duties of the French chivalric heroes are primarily ceremonial, even by the thirteenth century the Welsh demand very real participation from their kings.

The chief conflicts of the narrative place Gereint at odds not only with strangers – the knight in the forest and the various robber barons encountered on their journey – but with everything and everyone from which he should be drawing support: his overlord, his father, his fellow knights, and

⁷⁰⁴Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 101.

⁷⁰⁵Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 24. 'As had been his custom in Arthur's court, Gereint went to tournaments, and became known to the bravest and strongest men until he was renowned in that region as in the place he was before, and until he had made his court and his companions and his noblemen wealthy with the best horses and the best armour and the best and most exceptional golden jewels.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 157.

⁷⁰⁶Fulton, 'Individual and Society' p. 42.

his wife. Masculine anxieties stemming from a concern that Gereint is not adequately fulfilling the role of heroic warrior are mediated through his wife, who, as is often the case of women in medieval romance, functions as an external indicator of the male hero's status. The marital disagreement is not the true conflict, especially since through the entire text, Enid refuses to participate in it; rather the conflict is really between Gereint and his native, homosocial warband – between two competing models of martial masculinity.

It has been observed by various scholars, McNamara and Gaunt among them, that maintaining a patriarchy requires imposition of a narrow definition of 'compulsory heterosexuality' which can be as oppressive to men as it is to women. That definition, however, is itself unstable, dependent on the particular cultural concerns of dominant hegemony. When that hegemony feels under threat from outside forces – which describes most of the political landscape of medieval Wales – the performance of masculine behaviour required of an aristocratic warrior class becomes especially prescribed. In the case of *Gereint*, the eponymous hero's adoption of continental, foreign customs provokes anxieties in his native British court, and these anxieties are projected by both parties onto the figure of Enid.

After beating his bounds, Gereint settles down to rule his kingdom, and 'dechreu caru esmwythder ac ysgyualwch a oruc ynteu...a charu y wreic a gwastadrwyd yn y lys'.⁷⁰⁷ In this way he is similar to Arthur, whose court has not faced significant threat in quite some time and functions as an extended family unit, and who must, if he wishes adventure, seek it elsewhere. But Gereint is not Arthur, and his continued withdrawal from public life distresses the court, who depend on him for their reputations as well as his own:

...ac yn ol hynny caru yscaualwch o'e ystauell a'y wreic hyd nod oed digrif dim ganthaw namyn hynny, yny yttoed yn colli callon y wyrda a'e hela a'e digrifwch, a challon cwbyl o niuer y llys, ac yny oed ymodrwrdd a gogan arnaw dan law gan dylwyth y llys am y uot yn ymgolli yn gyn lwyret a hynny ac eu kydyndeithas hwynt o garyat gwreic.⁷⁰⁸

707Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 24. '...began to enjoy relaxation and leisure...and making love to his wife and being at peace in his court.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 157

708Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 24-25. 'But then he began to enjoy staying in his chamber alone with his wife so that nothing else pleased him, until he was losing the affection of his noblemen as well as his hunting and his pleasure, and the affection of all the company at court, until there was murmuring and mocking in secret by the court household

This in itself is hardly an unusual occurrence, either in medieval or modern life. The modern reader may in fact be highly sympathetic to a young man, forced by circumstance into responsibility he neither wants nor is fully prepared for, wanting to spend his spare time in the company of his partner. Similarly, one can likely identify with the frustration of his comrades in losing his company. Perhaps Gereint is shy, perhaps he is tired, perhaps, as his councillors seem to fear, he is simply so besotted with Enid he finds her company and her chamber preferable to other forms of recreation. Jeannie Watson observes that Geraint's uxorious obsession with Enid 'excludes him from the real life going on around him, cuts him off from active knighthood, [and] causes disharmony' within his court.⁷⁰⁹ He is failing in the public responsibilities that are an integral part of performative masculine kingship. For the establishment of a heroic, martial masculine identity, this apparent slothfulness is bad enough – but it is apparently a slippery slope, and soon he has given up even these peacetime pleasures in favour of staying in bed with his wife. This costs him, we are told, 'the affection of all the company at court', and 'there was murmuring and mocking in secret by the court household'.⁷¹⁰ But while it is Gereint who is failing in his responsibilities, the blame for his actions is directed at Enid. Erbin, Gereint's father, upon hearing the court gossip, confronts not Gereint himself but Enid, assigning the responsibility for his son's abandonment of his social, public obligations to her influence.

For young men to succumb to lovesickness is acceptable only until marriage. As previously seen when discussing Culhwch and his sudden, insurmountable longing for Olwen, the early middle ages recognised lovesickness as a feminine disease affecting the masculinity of otherwise potent males. McNamara observes that at some points in the middle ages, literature tended toward releasing the males from the compulsion of physical desire, with the responsibility for sexuality resting on the women:

because he was so completely deserting their company for the love of a woman.' Davies, p. 157.

⁷⁰⁹Watson, Jeanie. 'Enid the disobedient: The *Mabinogion's* Gereint and Enid', *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson, eds. (Detroit 1987) 114-132, p. 118.

⁷¹⁰Davies p. 157.

Polite literature exhibited a new focus on women's control over the act of love as well as her control over her courting lover. Woman's right to sex was implicit in the church's emphasis on consent and marital affection as the foundation of marriage.⁷¹¹

While this might sound empowering, as a cultural phenomenon it really serves only to shift onto the perceived deficiencies of the female sex even more of the blame for sinful behaviour brought about by the Fall of Man. Therefore, to spend all his time enjoying Enid's company, Gereint is both feminised himself, and appears to put himself under the control of his wife, a situation which causes anxiety amongst his knights and demonstrates a lack of balance in the relationship. This is a curious situation; the level of control a woman was meant to have over a knight was balanced delicately in French courtly literature and entirely confusing in the Welsh. He would fight for her, honour her, and profess undying love to her, but all this acted ultimately as a vehicle for competition between male comrades. When he actually shows more interest in being with her than showing off for her, the balance is disrupted. Combined with his father's increasing age, Gereint's behaviour puts his kingdom and his *teulu* under the perception of threat despite clear evidence that they are in fact at peace. Coded as a feminine and domestic space, the court was already a locus of anxiety and perceived as a direct challenge to martial virility.⁷¹² According to Ad Putter, those most likely to be accused of effeminacy in twelfth-century clerical discourse 'are Byzantines, uxorious husbands and...knights at court', two of which can be applied here.⁷¹³ Gereint, whose behaviour already strays too far from the accepted normative standard of martial might, causes anxiety on several fronts. Enid's entrance into the equation disrupts the homosocial arena and thereby calls into question the sanctity and value of the native culture of the war-band, and her and Gereint's continued presence in the privacy of the court require immediate remedy: a remedy which takes the form of their removal from the court itself.

An excess of love not only threatens one's masculine prowess, but inflames jealousy — also

711 McNamara, Jo Ann. 'The Herrenfrage: The restructuring of the gender system, 1050-1150' *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994) 3-30 p. 10.

712 Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' p. 51.

713 Putter, Ad. 'Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy,' *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA 1995), 34-49, p. 34. See Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy', p. 50.

a healthy boost to competition in small doses, but a dangerous emotional state in excess. This the text seems to prove true: there is no evidence to suggest that Enid's gazing soulfully down at her sleeping husband means she's having an affair, save that invented by his overactive insecurity. It may stem from the same martial worldview that caused Luned to expect great things of Owein, linking sexual and martial performance. It may stem from the threat to his manhood by the complaints of his father and his knights; he won Enid by martial prowess and may now worry that she, like the others, feels he is getting soft and is losing respect for him. This is the reasoning given by Chrétien in *Erec*, who leaves out the suspicion of infidelity. Thomson suggests that in *Gereint*, he is woken by Enid's voice and her tears without actually hearing what she says, despite the narrator's implication that he did hear her, but misinterpreted her motivation, because 'it is difficult to see him leaping to the conclusion he did unless he was already not only possessive but jealous and suspicious'.⁷¹⁴ Brynley Roberts, meanwhile, attempts to reconcile the ideology of *Erec* by blaming the Welsh redactor for adding 'popular' elements:

Rhaid i Erec ei brofi ei hun yn filwr a rheoli ei deimladau cariadus at ei wraig fel mai diben eu taith yw ennill y cydbwysedd hwnnw iddo. Collir llawer o hyn yn Gereint ac Enid. Erbyn y drydedd adran trawssffurfir y tyndra sifalrïaidd, astrus a chymesurededd yr amrywiol swyddogaethau yn rhywbeth llai arwyddocaol, mwy poblogaidd amgyffredadwy—dicter cwcwallt.⁷¹⁵

Fulton, in a more recent study, emphasises the multiple meanings of the word 'jealousy' itself, which in the middle ages carried with it the implication not only of sexual insecurity, but of uxoriousness, possessiveness, the act of a husband keeping too close to his wife for comfort.⁷¹⁶ She also notes that the jealousy theme necessarily undermines Gereint and Enid's allegedly stable identities to provoke the questions that prompt the remainder of the narrative.⁷¹⁷

Insecurity and jealousy are a destructive combination, and Gereint temporarily says farewell to good sense. In *Owein*, an originally happy marriage also leads to strife and madness, in almost an exact mirror image of the situation in *Gereint*. Where Owein fits the particular brand of masculinity

⁷¹⁴Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 105.

⁷¹⁵ Roberts, Brynley, 'Sylwadau ar "ramant" *Gereint ac Enid*,' *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 28 (1992) 29-42, p. 36.

⁷¹⁶ Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy', p. 53.

⁷¹⁷ Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' *passim*.

most often found in such tales, where warlike men in medieval Wales seem to be unsuited to the peaceful married state for long, and therefore loses his wife, Gereint undermines his masculine identity and loses the respect of his homosocial peer group by showing too much affection for his lady's feminine charms. Thomson suggests that if the redactor of the Welsh version had only Chrétien as a source, he may have been responsible for the inclusion of jealousy as an explanation of Gereint's behaviour, as the French Erec has no such suspicion or jealousy, but only 'the desire to show her that he had not lost his enthusiasm for knightly pursuits'.⁷¹⁸ Fulton attributes his anger at Enid's possible infidelity to the recurring Welsh theme of tribal and patriarchal control over the woman's reproductive power, especially when that woman was an important member of the ruling family; an affair on her part would threaten the social cohesion of the court.⁷¹⁹

The scene showing Enid and Gereint in bed, in which she gazes lovingly down at him and cries for his lost reputation, is unique in Welsh Arthurian texts, and rare in medieval literature in general, in showing a private moment between a married couple:

A boregweith yr haf yd oydynt yn y gwely (ac ynteu vrth yr erchwyn, ac Enyt a oed heb gysgu) y mwyn ystauell wydrin, a'r heul yn tywynnu ar y gwely, a'r dillad gwedy ry lithraw y ar y dwyuron ef a'e dwy ureich, ac ynteu yn kyscu. Sef a oruc hitheu, ydrych tecket ac aruthred yr olwe a welei arnaw, a dywedut, 'Gway ui,' heb hi, 'os o'm achaws i y mae y breicheu hyn a'r dwyuron yn colli clot a milwryaeth kymeint ac a oed eidunt!'⁷²⁰

It is a tender and very visual scene: the summer sun shining through the glass; the young man's body, for now still intact, prone in a tousled, slumbering peace. In a body of literature in which most of the action takes place on a public stage, to be heard and remarked upon by other members of the social group, private moments are rare indeed. Even their private bedchamber appears to be at least partly public, if we are to take 'ystauell wydrin' at all literally. Watson suggests that the 'intimacy of the scene is intensified by the fact that the "glass chamber" belongs to Enid, while Gereint sleeps on the "outer, protective side," that is, that his anxiety is born of a perceived

⁷¹⁸Thomson, *Gereint* p. lxix.

⁷¹⁹Fulton, 'Individual and Society,' p. 44.

⁷²⁰Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 'One morning in the summer they were in bed (he on the outer edge, and Enid had not slept) in a chamber of glass, and the sun shining on the bed; and the bedclothes had slipped off his chest and arms, and he was asleep. She gazed at this handsome and wonderful sight, and said, "Woe is me," she said, "if it is on my account that these arms and chest are losing the fame and prowess they once possessed.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 158.

threat on the security of the marital chamber and his own ability to protect it.⁷²¹ Fulton has noted that in the Welsh texts, the narrative voice remains anonymous while the characters remain in the arena of public life, with little room for personal reaction, and suggests this stems from an objective to 'reproduce the hegemony of the Welsh nobleman and his *teulu*'.⁷²² Despite women's power being primarily confined to the home and domestic sphere, they are most often seen fulfilling the public function of generous hostess, and the instances in which they are found alone – Culhwch's stepmother and the hag, Luned's conversation with the *iarlles*, and Enid here with Gereint – it is to address a specific problem the text has introduced, and generally indicates something is amiss. Furthermore, placing the scene in their bedroom – the one place where Enid is inarguably the sole influence of Gereint's actions – with the knight asleep, serves to emphasise his masculine decline and locate him firmly in the weakest point of feminine influence and the domestic sphere. But at the same time, it reminds us that this is the only place Enid's voice is heard; hitherto she has been passive and silent with little indication she has thoughts and feelings of her own. The secluded oasis of her bedroom is the only place she has to speak them. Even then she does so when her husband is asleep, and she has no reason to believe anyone will overhear her. There is no conversation between them once he wakes, only their separate anxieties, her tears and his 'kyffroes' ('disturbed') mind.⁷²³ Her private self, up until now, has not been allowed a voice. When at last she does speak, even in solitude, her words spark a crisis of identity for her husband. The danger of private female speech and its ability to upset the natural order are certainly on display here.

Gereint and Enid's journey

Enid tolerates Gereint's sudden change of heart better than Owein's *iarlles* took his, and while she speaks less than Chrétien's Enide, nevertheless exhibits patience, compassion, and good sense. Bromwich calls *Gereint* a 'rendering of the popular medieval theme of the triumph of female

⁷²¹Watson, 'Enid the disobedient,' p. 125.

⁷²²Fulton, 'Individual and society' p. 30.

⁷²³Thomson, *Gereint*, p 25. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 158.

constancy over all impediments' in the manner of the story of Patient Griselda, but intermingled with themes of a primarily Celtic origin.⁷²⁴ However, the text portrays Gereint as petulant and snappy, especially as the audience is perfectly aware his wife loves him as much as ever, and likely more than he deserves. If that were ever in doubt, their impromptu journey certainly confirms it, as like many a medieval or modern wife, she follows him willingly but ignores his demands when it seems prudent to do so. She is also clearly the one of the pair of them to behave rationally, and take active steps to protect their lives in a series of encounters with hostile knights. 'The lesson,' Watson observes, 'belongs to Gereint, and [he] is a slow learner. The repetition...allows whatever sympathy the reader might have had for Gereint's view of things to evaporate.'⁷²⁵ The series of quests through the narrative also serves to undermine and destabilise the couple's gender identities by removing them from the hall where they have been comfortable, and to reinforce their eventual adherence and return to the accepted normative power structures. Importantly, and as noted by Fulton, even the final establishment of Gereint and Enid to accepted, normative gender identities, with all the necessary status markers, remains troubled, as the text has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that both gender and nobility are innate features yet has, in doing so, forced itself to over-determine them time and time again.⁷²⁶ Leaving the domestic sphere of the court – a place coded as feminine – both forces Gereint to demonstrate his martial virility and allows Enid to adopt a more flexible gender identity.⁷²⁷ Furthermore, by leaving behind the visible status markers of her married life – particularly the fine clothes that marked her entrance into courtly society – Enid is rendered anonymous and the innate nobility that is a requirement of her marriage called into question.⁷²⁸

As discussed already, much has been made of female speech in medieval Welsh literature as the way women in the texts wield influence and exercise whatever power they have. Gereint, then, attempts to deprive Enid of her own agency by silencing her, rendering her powerless to control or

⁷²⁴Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 356.

⁷²⁵Watson, 'Enid the disobedient,' p. 126.

⁷²⁶ Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' *passim*.

⁷²⁷ For more on the gendered aspects of the court see See Molly Martin, 'Castles and the Architecture of Gender in Malory's *The Knight of the Cart*', *Arthuriana* 22.2 (2012): 37–51.

⁷²⁸ Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' pp 56-58.

affect him. The attempt is entirely unsuccessful – indeed, it is only after being commanded to silence that Enid properly finds her voice – but it is a power she only invokes when she and her husband are in danger, suggesting both that she is willing to put up with his strange behaviour but only to a point, and that she possesses the necessary judgement to use her own power wisely. She never actually acquiesces to his demand for silence, but only says, 'mi a wnaŷ uŷg gallu' ('I will do my best').⁷²⁹ When he gives up attempting it, claiming irritably that 'ac nŷd gwell im...dywedut yrthyt ti no thewi' ('it is no use my telling you to be quiet'), she points out quite politely that she is only telling him important things, such as when he is under imminent attack: “Bydaf, arglwyd, hyd y gallwyf,” heb hi, “eithyr na allaf kelu ragot y geireu engiriawlchweru a glywaf y'th gyueir, arglwyd, y gan estronawl giwdawdoed a gerdo diffeithwch mal y rei hynny.”⁷³⁰

Gereint, rather than appreciate his wife's concern for him, leaves her to struggle alone with their newly-captured horses. The distance between them as they ride, with her some way in front of him, symbolises their new estrangement as well as limiting her ability to soothe or influence him with conversation. It also makes her appear alone and vulnerable to the myriad enemies they encounter on the road, giving Gereint ample opportunities to demonstrate to her that he has not, in fact, lost any of his strength of arms. The text has made it clear by this point that the reader's sympathy should lie with the faithful and virtuous Enid, but a later episode, in which their host plans to abduct Enid and possibly kill Gereint, demonstrates both her devotion to him and her ingenuity while positioning her alongside other fast-talking heroines of native Welsh tales.

The couple are staying with a local lord, the *iarll dwnn* (dark-brown earl) who, falling in love with Enid over dinner, actually asks Gereint's permission to court her, and he, with little explanation, gives it. This plays out differently in Chrétien's work, which follows more closely the conventions of *fin' amors*; in the French tale the earl declares his intention to offer service to Enid

⁷²⁹Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 29. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 161.

⁷³⁰Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 29. “I will, lord, as far as I can,” she said, “except that I cannot hide from you the horrible hateful words that I hear about you, lord, from bands of strangers that travel the wilderness such as those.” Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 161.

while confirming his loyalty to Erec, who 'was not the least bit jealous, envisaging no deception in this'.⁷³¹ Within the structure of courtly love, a knight's love-service to the lady of his liege lord is expected, and would not cause suspicion.

Thomson notes that nothing in the context of the earl's conversation with Enid shows whether he knows they are married, but that he may suspect they are eloping together and as they appear now to be estranged he may think one or both of them is now regretting doing so. As Gereint is preoccupied with proving himself right, it is left to Enid herself to defend her own marriage vows. The earl makes his intentions explicit: '...o lladaf i y gwr racco mi a'th gaf di tra uynnwyf, a gwedy na'th uynnwyf mi a'th yrraf ymdeith. Os o'th uod y gvney ditheu yrof i, kyssondeb diwahan tragywydawl a yud y rom tra uon uyw.'⁷³²

Enid, finding her position vulnerable, agrees, on the condition that he come again in the morning and abduct her, giving the public appearance of her own resistance. This entire episode follows a certain accepted pattern, for as Kathryn Gravdal has noted, scenes of attempted rape – whether explicit or implied – are one of the required 'set pieces' of romance, and built into the genre's premise.⁷³³ The type of 'ravishment' with which Enid is threatened, in which the sexual threat to her remains unconsummated though explicitly stated, falls under what she defines as '*raptus mulierus*' and can fulfil a number of functions.⁷³⁴ Such episodes serve as a chivalric test for the hero, whereby he can prove his own martial prowess; as a moral challenge to the hero's commitment to the ethics of chivalry; and as a testimony to the victim's physical desirability.⁷³⁵ Gravdal, in her discussion of *raptus* in the works of Chrétien, also include among its functions the indication of social class – Chrétien's rapists are nearly always inferior in the social order to the

⁷³¹Chrétien, *Four Arthurian Romances*, p. 78.

⁷³²Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 35. 'If I kill that man, I will have you for as long as I want, and when I want you no longer I will turn you away. But if you do this for me of your own free will, there will be an unbroken, everlasting agreement between us as long as we live.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 165.

⁷³³Gravdal, Kathryn. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia 1991) p. 42.

⁷³⁴*ibid.*

⁷³⁵*Ibid.* p. 44.

noblewomen they kidnap – and a greater political macro-meaning as a test of a kingdom's strength.⁷³⁶ *Gereint* certainly makes use the first function, as the scene results in the hero's defeating the entire combined forces of his enemy; the narrative also uses the Earl's attraction to Enid to remind the audience that other men will appreciate what Gereint has, even if he does not. The political implications are found, or at least suggested, in other Welsh texts, however it is Gereint, rather than Enid, in this case whose being is representative of the state of the kingdom.

However, the relative social positions of the characters are somewhat inverted by the text. The earl appears rich and noble enough, and while a surface reading may suggest that his actions mark him out as being unworthy of his own rank, the fact remains, once again, that he has no reason to suspect who his guests are. Gereint has not been telling people his name. Enid, in journeying with him, has by his command taken off the fine clothes which would have been given to her upon her marriage, and in the poor dress she had before her wedding has regressed, to some extent, to her previous state of nameless poverty. Fulton suggests this difference between the French and Welsh versions stems from 'a specifically Welsh insistence on the definition of nobility as strictly a matter of birth, not wealth', and with this in mind, we might see the text's presentation of Enid as fundamentally, innately noble, Gereint as reluctantly so, and the earl as failing in this regard.⁷³⁷ On the other hand, as seen in the earlier chapter on *Culhwch ac Olwen*, marriage by capture (*raubehe*) was not uncommon in the middle ages or even before.⁷³⁸ Such cases were, at various points in history, accepted methods for arranging marriages without parental permission, avenging actual or perceived wrongs done by a lord by depriving him of his wife, or arranging to inherit a widow's holdings, though by the late middle ages they were no longer common occurrences in ecclesiastical courts.⁷³⁹ Certainly the politically-motivated kidnapping of wives and fiancées was not unheard of in medieval Wales. A local example – too late to be directly alluded to in *Gereint*, but certainly not

⁷³⁶*ibid.* p. 44.

⁷³⁷Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy,' p. 56.

⁷³⁸Dunn, Caroline. *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction and Adultery 1100-1500* (Cambridge 2013) p. 83.

⁷³⁹*ibid.*

without precedent – is the 1275 kidnapping of Eleanor de Montfort by pirates in the employ of Edward I, while en route to Wales to solemnise her marriage with Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.⁷⁴⁰ While that particular example comes from the late thirteenth century, the problem of stealing wives had been going on for some time and the trope is recognisable in literature from Helen of Troy onward. In twelfth-century Ireland, a feud between Diarmaid Mac Murchada, the king of Leinster, and his rival Tigernán Ua Ruairc was compounded when Diarmaid kidnapped Tigernán's wife Derbforgaill, an incident which led ultimately to Tigernán's invasion of Leinster, Diarmaid's flight to the court of Henry II for aid, and the eventual Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland.⁷⁴¹ A court case in thirteenth-century Coventry deals with the competing inheritance claims from a situation in which an itinerant knight who had fought for King Stephen abducted and forcibly married the daughter of a local lord; they had one son before he was executed and she was returned to her father and married to her original betrothed.⁷⁴² A famous Welsh example is the abduction of Nest ferch Rhys by Owain ap Cadwgan, an episode described in a romantic style itself in the *Brut y Tywysogion*.⁷⁴³ Further examples abound throughout medieval Europe, and precautions taken by noble fathers on behalf of their daughters speak to the very real concern about the dangers which could face an unprotected heiress.⁷⁴⁴ The trope is certainly common within Arthurian literature; the frequent abductions of Gwenhwyfar certainly suggest that while villainous, the kidnapping of noblewomen was well within the audience's expectations. Rape, marriage, and sexual sin fell under the jurisdiction of canon law, much of which descended from the early laws of the Roman empire. While early Roman law had several incarnations dealing with the staged abductions of young women by their lovers, the practise carried on at least through the mid-twelfth century and the introduction of the *Decretum*

740PRO Liberate Rolls C62/52, National Archives (digital image). Far from trying to hide his involvement, Edward is shown as having paid six men some 220 marks for carrying out the abduction. It should be allowed that Edward was not kidnapping Eleanor to marry her himself, but rather to keep her away from Llywelyn. It is also interesting that this is the era when England begins to legislate against marriage by abduction. See Dunn, *Stolen Women*, especially chapter 3.

741Dunn, Caroline S. *Damsels in Distress or Partners in Crime?* (Fordham 2007) p. 193.

742Dunn, *Damsels*, p. 141.

743 Williams ab Ithel, John. *Brut y Tywysogion* (London 1860) pp. 82-83.

744Dunn, *Stolen Women*, pp. 82-97 *passim*.

of Gratian, which set about redefining laws and codes regarding rape, marriage and seduction.⁷⁴⁵ Within Wales, the native law of Hywel Dda delineated specific definitions of and penalties for sexual crimes.⁷⁴⁶ Here is where Enid's ingenuity shows, as well as the devious wordplay exhibited so often by Welsh ladies; like Rhiannon in the First Branch she is hedging her bets. Of course her plan, which is ultimately successful, is to warn Gereint and for the two of them to escape in the middle of the night. But even had that not gone according to plan, she could, under both medieval Church law and native Welsh law, still prosecute the earl. According to the *Decretum Gratiani*, the crime of *raptus* included four parts: violence, abduction, coitus, and lack of consent. Most canonists who dealt with the text agreed to a wide interpretation of the 'violence' and 'consent' requirements: it need not be especially brutal violence, but could be as simple as a threat 'so long as there was reasonable cause to believe that the attacker was able and willing to carry out the threat'.⁷⁴⁷ Likewise consent can not have been granted under coercion, either physical or mental, and the suggestion that her refusal will lead to the murder of her husband seems likely to qualify. Thus, once he has actually abducted and slept with her, she would be able to appeal to Arthur for reparation. Given her standing at Arthur's court and her own position as the wife of a king, she can likely be reasonably confident that the earl, for all his attitude, will submit to Arthur himself and not only return her to her husband but be required to pay a considerable amount of money in recompense. The Welsh laws allowed for several variations on reparations for *raptus*: a payment by the perpetrator of an *amobr* to the lord, a *sarhaed* paid to both the victim and her husband, and a share of the ravisher's property as if it were a divorce settlement, as it 'was a union which had come to an end, without fault on [her] part'.⁷⁴⁸ All things considered, the earl might well have decided Enid might not be worth the trouble, but all he sees at his table are a poor travelling knight estranged from his lady. Once again, without

745Brundage, James A., 'Rape and seduction in medieval canon law,' *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo 1982) p.142.

746For a full discussion of definitions and punishments for rape within native Welsh law see Morfydd E. Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin' and Dafydd Jenkins, 'Property Interests in the Welsh Classical Law of Women,' both in *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff 1980), specifically pp. 49-50 and pp. 86-90.

747Brundage, 'Rape and seduction,' p. 143.

748Jenkins, Dafydd. 'Property Interests in the Welsh Classical Law of Women,' *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, 69-92, p. 87.

the outward markers of her noble, married state, Enid's identity is anonymised and distanced from her normal social position.

Chrétien's Enide, while using a similar strategy, is more obviously devious, and Chrétien warns the reader that 'she knew well how to intoxicate a rogue with words when she put her mind to it'.⁷⁴⁹ She claims her initial refusal was not out of loyalty to Erec, but only to ascertain the depth and fervour of the earl's love for her. She then lies outright to him, telling him Erec has already abducted her, and agreeing to steal his sword so he can be murdered in the early morning, unarmed, in his bed — a ruse that was unlikely to find sympathy with a native Welsh audience. Enid's innate nobility requires that she not resort to such deception. If the earl wants the lady, he will have to prove he can take her, in armed combat and properly martial fashion.

This insistence on Enid's honesty may be a feature retained more from continental romance than native to Welsh literature, where women can resort to devious means to achieve their ends without being condemned by either other characters or the text itself. Rhiannon in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, for instance, quite deviously arranges for a rejected suitor to be trapped and badly beaten by members of her wedding party, and the result is portrayed as a victory for her and her husband Pwyll.⁷⁵⁰ Meanwhile in the *rhamantau*, as in continental romance, while women may lie to protect their own virtue, deceptive tactics in general are used to lure and trap knights in positions which will challenge or compromise their morals.⁷⁵¹

And Gereint, for all he claims to not want Enid any longer, is nevertheless prepared to defend his claim to her, defeating all eighty knights in the earl's warband as well as the lord himself⁷⁵². Presented with an opportunity to defend and display his martial prowess, he acquits himself sufficiently to retain the markers of his masculine noble status.

But Gereint's journey to manhood is not yet complete, nor his identity fully reconciled. The

⁷⁴⁹Chrétien, *Four Arthurian Romances* p. 79.

⁷⁵⁰See Davies, *Mabinogion*, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁵¹See, for example, Yvette Kisor, "'Naked as a nedyll: the eroticism of Malory's Elaine', *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse, and Cory James Rushton, eds. (Cambridge: Boydell 2014) 55-68.

⁷⁵²Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 167.

following episode pits Gereint against *y Brenin Bychan* in a scene that suggests a similar tradition to Owein's meeting with the Gŵr Du at the well.⁷⁵³ The location is a bridge – both a strategic and water-related place, although the fight is rationalised somewhat by a fellow knight-errant warning Gereint that 'canys y gynedyf yw na daw marchawc ar y dir ef na mynno ef ymwelet ac ef' ('it is his custom to fight every knight that comes onto his land').⁷⁵⁴

That there is something Otherworldly about *y Brenin Bychan* seems likely, given his smaller-than-usual size and tremendous skill, and by this 'cynneddf' he appears to hold a role similar to Owein or the Gŵr Du in being obligated to challenge any other warriors who approach. He is also fully integrated with his own body and armour, and comfortable in his own role.⁷⁵⁵ Gereint, we are told, 'ef a welei uarchawc yn y ol y ar catuarch cadarndew kerdetdrut llydangarn bronehang; ac ny welsei eiroet gwr lei noc a welei ar y march, a dogynder o arueu ymdanaw ac am y uarch'.⁷⁵⁶ Small Gwiffret might be, but his manhood and prowess are not in question. This may, in fact, be the reason for Gereint's seeking to provoke him. Having been warned off by another knight that he will 'nu y keffy gywilid a gwarthaet' ('be shamed and humiliated, fiercely, with courage and fury') if he challenges *y Brenin Bychan*, it appears he feels his ascendant masculinity has been called into question and he must defend it.⁷⁵⁷

This reading may also explain why he rejects the offer of an escape route to the actual fight, when Gwiffret offers Gereint the opportunity to avoid battle by accompanying him to his lord's court. The term *llys* could be used here in either the judicial or the courtly sense; Thomson expresses ambivalence over the meaning. Either, he suggests, Gereint is refusing to submit to adjudication by Gwiffret's overlord unless it is Arthur, or as in Guest's translation, he does not want

⁷⁵³Davies notes that the text introduces him bilingually: 'The French and the English call him *Gwiffred* [Guivret] *Petit*, but the Welsh call him *Y Brenin Bychan*,' acknowledging the bilingual context of the tale's and its audience. *Mabinogion* p. 259.

⁷⁵⁴Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 39-40. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 167. 'Cynneddf' implies a habit or characteristic trait, which corresponds to Chrétien's use of 'costume' (custom) as an established habit to which one is compelled to adhere.

⁷⁵⁵Gwiffret also apparently has no problems seeing Enid's innate nobility through her impoverished appearance, and his obvious sympathy for both her and Gereint sets him outside the usual 'aggressor on the road' character type.

⁷⁵⁶Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 38. 'he could see a knight following him on a sturdy, strong charger, bold-paced and wide-hoofed and broad-chested. And he had never seen a man smaller than the one he saw on the horse, and plenty of armour on him and his horse.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 168.

⁷⁵⁷Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 39. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 168.

to be taken out of his way by going to Gwiffret's castle or that of his overlord 'unless he is Arthur', that is, a destination familiar to him already.⁷⁵⁸ In either case, Gereint's claim that he would visit Arthur's court ring does not especially true, since he will shortly be seen attempting to avoid his old companions as well.

Despite not having a specific destination, he will not at this point be dissuaded from his journey. His wounds begin to ache 'dolor yna yn uwy no fan y cawsei' ('more so than when he had first received [them]') and he stops to rest for a while under a tree.⁷⁵⁹ Enid, by this point exhausted and likely no small bit annoyed, sits in silence under another tree and makes no attempt to tend his wounds or offer conversation. It may be that both of them find the process of reconciliation with their accepted social identities a stressful one the closer they come to the end of it. Gereint's physical injuries serve to mark the stages of his journey toward an acceptable level of masculine prowess, while Enid's silence may demonstrate her alignment with her prescribed social role as much as a moment of exhaustion.

This is where Cai finds them, travelling nearby with Arthur's *teulu*. The scene in which he questions the strangers is nearly exactly like one that occurs in *Peredur* and similar to one in *Owein*. Cai's questioning Gereint is, in fact, perfectly in keeping with his role as Arthur's steward, the duties of which include discovering the identity of potentially suspicious people; therefore Thomson, rather than placing all the blame on his rough manner, notes that Gereint's refusal to answer 'is sufficient to constitute a quarrel (*kywirha*) to be settled by force'.⁷⁶⁰ Similarly, Gereint's response in hitting with the butt, rather than the point, of his spear could be taken to mean, as it does in *Peredur*, that he finds his opponent an unworthy one; here, where Gereint recognises his opponent but Cai does not, it seems to indicate a reluctance to cause real injury to a member of his own social group and a valued member of his overlord's *teulu*. Much like the similar scene in

⁷⁵⁸Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 125. Davies preserves the ambiguity of the original text in her translation, having Gereint say only that 'I would not go to your lord's court unless Arthur were your lord.'

⁷⁵⁹Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 41. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 169.

⁷⁶⁰Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 128.

Peredur, Cai fails to move the 'stranger' and the task falls to Gwalchmai, whose manner is generally more gentle and who, after fighting with him, recognises him.⁷⁶¹ Even then, Gereint denies his own identity, for reasons of his own – it seems likely that, like Owain in the grips of madness, he is prohibited from reclaiming his own identity until he has righted the situation that brought him away from his kingdom in the first place. While the circumstances leading up to the confrontation are different in each case, *Owein* and *Peredur* each also contain a similar scene in which the narrative requires friends to fight. In all three of these Cai is defeated while the problem is solved by Gwalchmai, whose gentle disposition and exemplary martial ability make him a suitable mediator and ideal example of a hybrid masculinity inhabiting the border of heroic and courtly genres.

He functions as mediator here as well, arranging for Gereint and Enid to meet with Arthur. Gereint continues to be petulant, while Enid is clearly relieved to see them; the text says that 'llawenhau a oruc medwl y uorwyn' ('the maiden's heart rejoiced') when reunited with Arthur and the queen.⁷⁶² Her adventures have allowed her to expand the boundaries of her identity and to adopt more masculine attributes and functions, but individualism is a lonely road. The demands of an ultimately conservative genre might be expected to privilege a return to the home comforts of conformity with accepted roles, even if Enid's character proves more lively when separated from them. This is only a short reprieve for her, but serves as a kind of caesura, a resting place for Gereint to have his injuries healed. Meanwhile Enid is taken to Gwenhwyfar, who replaces her old and poor clothes and temporarily restores to her the outward signs of her position. While the couple remain with Arthur and his men, they both reassume their public identities, and the incomplete nature of Gereint's progress toward full adult masculinity is mitigated by his physical injuries.

Arthur acts more of a father figure than ever, refusing to listen to Gereint's protests or indulge his foolish behaviour:

'Arglwyd, heb y Gereint, 'ni a awn ymdeith, gan dy genyad.' 'Pa le uyd hynny?' heb yr Arthur; 'ny

⁷⁶¹Unlike the similar scene in *Peredur*, however, Gwalchmai does not achieve his success entirely through diplomatic speech, but by breaking Gereint's shield on his spear end.

⁷⁶²Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 44. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 171.

elly di uyned yr awyron onyt ey y orfen dy agheu.' 'Ny adei ef y mi,' heb y Gwalchmei, gvahawd arnaw.' 'Ef a'e gad y mi,' heb yr Arthur, 'ac y gyt a hynny yt a ef odyma yny uo iach.'⁷⁶³

Arthur's overlordship is recognised, and although Gereint continues to ask permission to depart the camp, he submits and is kept there for a month as his injuries are healed. Middleton notes that this leads to one of the many narrative inconsistencies within the text which he suggests may indicate an oral origin: although Gereint has been fully healed before leaving Arthur's camp, his wounds reopen immediately the next time he takes part in a battle.⁷⁶⁴ Perhaps this is for the sake of drama; a wounded knight collapsing from his horse at his wife's feet is a more compelling image than another fight in which the hero's opponents present no challenge. It also serves, however, to indicate the incomplete state of Gereint's growth in the tale, much like the denial of his identity. Arthur's authority may be able to patch over the wounds, bind the blood, and soothe the rough places, but cannot solve the personal problems between a man and his wife, or the mental and emotional insecurity of a young man not yet ready for adulthood. Gereint's body, with its requisite tools and accoutrements, is a part of his warrior identity, and until he has regained the latter, the former will remain compromised. Fulton takes note of the implicit tragedy of that reclaiming, saying that his 'girlish appearance is transformed into that of a battle-scarred veteran . . . as if masculinity has to be literally beaten *into* him'.⁷⁶⁵ Despite the narrative's insistence that masculinity is a natural state, it actually requires repeated reinforcement by forcing Gereint to prove his performance of it again and again.

After leaving Arthur's company, Gereint and Enid encounter a woman shrieking over the body of a dead knight. The Welsh text uses the term *morwynwreic* for the woman – a compound

⁷⁶³Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 44. "'Lord," said Gereint, "we shall be on our way, with your permission." "Where will you go?" said Arthur. "You cannot go now unless you want to go to your death." "He would not allow me to invite them to stay," said Gwalchmai. "He will allow me," said Arthur, "and furthermore, he will not leave here till he is well." Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 171.

⁷⁶⁴Middleton, 'Owain', p. 151. Other questions arising, including 'inconsistencies or instances of inadequate motivation', include: how did every woman in the court sleep through the hunt? Why didn't Arthur let someone wake Gwenhwyfar? Why didn't someone wake Gereint? Why don't they own more horses? And if the queen and her maiden took the last two horses, where did Gereint's come from? Why does Earl Limwris, finding life in Gereint, take him back to the castle but do nothing to heal him? Thomson notes that 'these flaws in the narrative are not so very striking...a queen may change her mind or a king not care to argue with her, events may not always be related in a strictly chronological order...and not all motives are made explicit.' (Thomson lxxiii)

⁷⁶⁵Fulton, 'Gender and jealousy' p. 54.

made of the words for *maiden* and *wife*, and the legal designation for a woman whose marriage had not yet been consummated, or 'in the interval between her being given by her kindred to her husband and the wedding feast'.⁷⁶⁶ The word *gwraig* (MW *gwreic*) shares with the Old English *wyf*, as well as similar words in other languages, the shared designation of woman and wife. Sexual maturity carries with it the implication of marriage, or readiness for marriage, on the part of the female. Her new husband has just been killed by giants, and in keeping with the courtly obligation to assist damsels in distress, Gereint goes after them.

Yn ol y kewri yd aeth ynteu ac ymordiwst ac vynt a oruc. A mwy oed pob un onadunt no thrywyr, a chlwppa mawr a oed ar yscwyd pob un onadunt. Sef a oruc ynteu, dwyn ruthur y un onadunt a'e wan a gwayw trwy y berued; a thynnu y wayw o hwnnw a gwan arall onadunt trwydaw heuyt. A'r trydyt a ymhoelawd arnaw, ac a'e trewis a chlwppa yny hullt y daryan ac yny ettelis y yscwyd ynteu ac yny ymmegyr y holl welioed ynteu, ac yny uyd y waet yn colli oll.⁷⁶⁷

While the giant's blow is clearly mighty indeed, it is his old wounds, previously healed but still rendering him vulnerable, that cause Gereint to collapse at Enid's feet after defeating the giants. He is taken home by Earl Limwris, who, having been summoned by the screams of Enid and the maiden, dybygei uot peth o'r eneit' ('thought that there was still some life') in him.⁷⁶⁸

However, his rescuer makes no attempt to have his wounds healed but leaves him lying on his shield and instead makes advances to Enid. In particular, he offers her food and wine, and requests she put on another dress.

As has been shown, not only is Gereint's armour and weaponry integral to his identity but Enid's state of apparel is also crucial to hers. Specifically, noble attire represents the state of her marriage, her patronage by Arthur and Gwenhwyfar, and her location within both their court and her husband's. Therefore, to accept new clothing from Limwris is to accept by proxy his own patronage and offer of marriage. That the two things are bound up together is reflected by their proximity

⁷⁶⁶Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 130.

⁷⁶⁷Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 46. 'He went after the giants and caught up with them. And each one of them was larger than three men, and there was a huge club on the shoulder of each one. Gereint charged at one of them and stabbed him with a spear through his entrails; and he pulled his spear out of him and stabbed another of them too. But the third turned on him, and struck him with a club so that his shield splits until his shoulder stops the blow, and all his wounds open, and all his blood is pouring out.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 172.

⁷⁶⁸Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 47. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 173.

within the text itself:

...Gereint ar elor wely ar dal uort a oed yn y neuad. Diarchenu a oruc pawb onadunt. Ac erchi a oruc y iarll y Enyt diarchenu a chymryt gwise arall ymdanei. 'Na uynhaf, y rof a Duw,' heb hi. 'A unbennes,' heb ynteu, 'na uyd kyn dristet ti a hynny.' 'Anawd iawn yw uyg kyghori am hynny,' heb hi. 'Mi a uanagaf it,' heb ynteu, 'hyt nat reit it uod yn drist peth bynnac a uo y marchawc racco, na buy na marw. Y mae i mi iarllaeth da; ti a geffy honno y'th uedyant, a minheu gyt a hi,' heb ef; 'a byd lawen hyfryt bellach!'⁷⁶⁹

That the members of the court 'diarchenu' marks their re-entry into the domestic, interior space, and Enid's refusal to do the same keeps her separate from them while simultaneously continuing to bind her to Gereint. Meanwhile Limwris's offer, unlike that of the *iarll dwyn* from earlier in the narrative, includes no mention of love-service or romance, but is made on strictly economic terms. In this way it has something in common with the remarriage of the *iarlles* in *Owein*, whose mourning must necessarily be short-lived as she has a land to defend. Limwris may believe (and reasonably so) that Enid's distress stems from a similar situation – from anxiety over her own uncertain future once her husband is dead and she no longer has the right to the protection of his court. Welsh law made little provision for widows, especially to couples without children; such would be allowed to stay in the marital home for nine days, after which she should leave – but it did not specify where she could then go.⁷⁷⁰ Despite a wife's having become part of her husband's family group, they were apparently under no obligation to care for her upon his death. In this context, the earl's offer to Enid is not so repulsive as it appears purely within the context of a romantic genre which privileges the discourse of erotic love.

While previously Enid was moved to defend her own marriage vows with cleverness and wordplay, this time she resorts to stubbornness. As she constantly refused to obey Gereint's orders, so she refuses to comply with any of the earl's. Struck with grief for Gereint and doubtless exhausted, frustrated, and miserable, she is past dissembling and politeness. Her time spent distant

⁷⁶⁹Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 47. 'Gereint was placed just as he was, on the stretcher, on top of a table in the hall. They all took off their outdoor clothes. The earl told Enid to change and put on another dress. "I will not, between me and God," she said. "Lady," he replied, "don't be so sad." "It will be very difficult to persuade me on that matter," she said. "I am telling you," he replied, "that there is no need for you to be sad, whatever the fate of the knight over there, whether he lives or dies. I have a good earldom; you shall have it in your possession, together with me," he said. "And now be happy and contented.'" Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 173.

⁷⁷⁰Jenkins, Dafydd. 'Property interests in the classical Welsh law of women,' *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff 1980) 69-92, p. 85.

from the court has allowed her to build her own personality, to learn to speak on her own terms, and she rejects the offered reintegration to noble society. She refuses to change her clothes, eat, or make pleasant conversation, abandoning all trappings and pretense of the obligations of a noble woman. This frustrates the earl, who accepts this alteration in her perceived status by ceasing to treat her as a noble guest. He drags her about by force, threatens her, and finally strikes her. Enid 'dodi diaspat uawr arucheldost a dolouryawn yn uwy yna o lawer no chyn' ('gave a loud, sharp-piercing scream, and lamented more than before') and it is this breakdown which finally brings Gereint, at the edge of death, to his senses.⁷⁷¹ He rises and comes to his wife's aid, not only killing the earl but realising, at least privately, the sorrow he has caused: 'Ac edrych a oruc Gereint ar Enyt yna, a dyuot yndaw deu dolor, un ohonunt o welet Enyt wedy yr golli y lliw a'e gwed, a'r eil onadunt gwybot yna ohonaw y bot hi ar yr iawn.'⁷⁷²

Thomson observes that 'more to the point is the converse, that he had been in the wrong in his suspicions and his treatment of her.'⁷⁷³ Watson, meanwhile, argues that it is Enid's 'extreme and desperate' speech act which brings Gereint to his senses, and that in killing Limwris, he also kills 'the deceived man he himself had once been.'⁷⁷⁴ This marks the endpoint of Gereint's emotional journey, if not his physical one, and the reconciliation with his wife. The reconciliation shows the Welsh texts' practicality and lack of interest in romantic sentimentality, but also Gereint's new, appropriate masculine distance from his emotional self. Chrétien's Erec makes a long speech in which he forgives Enide for speaking ill of him – all without acknowledging that he should instead be apologising to her – and confirming both his love for her, and his surety of her. Gereint, upon realising the extent of his miserable behaviour, only asks Enid, 'a vdosti pa le y mae an meirch ni?' ('do you know where our horses are?').⁷⁷⁵ This time when they depart, he takes his wife with him on

⁷⁷¹Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 48. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 174.

⁷⁷²Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 48. 'Then Gereint looked at Enid, and he felt sorrowful on two accounts – first on seeing how Enid had lost her colour and appearance, and secondly on realising that she was in the right.' Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 174.

⁷⁷³Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 135.

⁷⁷⁴Watson, 'Enid the disobedient,' p. 128.

⁷⁷⁵ Thomson, *Gereint*, p. 48. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 174.

his saddlebow, and the closed distance between them is the final symbol and effect of their renewed affection. While one final adventure awaits Gereint to finally confirm his readiness to rule, the bulk of his journey, and his progress toward the martial, often brutal form of compulsive, heterosexual masculinity demanded of him, has been completed. Those elements required for acceptance into his full adult male state – arms, wife, and identity – are now fully integrated, symbolised by their proximity to his now battle-scarred body.

Enid, meanwhile, has finally found her voice and learned when and how to use it; her words will contribute now to her husband's masculine performance rather than call it into question. Her own *bonheddig* status has likewise been confirmed; where previously her lack of the outward signs of nobility and wealth had require she prove it in other ways. Both partners, then, can return home with their status and identities intact, fully assimilated into the life of the court.

Peredur fab Efrog

Of the three texts addressed in this chapter, it is *Historia Peredur fab Efrog* which presents the most baffling and intriguing puzzle, and the most complicated relationship not only with a vast number of continental variations but within its own redactions. Eleven manuscript versions exist, all showing remarkable variance and textual instability.⁷⁷⁶ The most well-known versions, in the White Book of Rhydderch (Peniarth 4, held in the National Library of Wales) and the Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College, Oxford MS 111), serve as parents to seven post-medieval descendants. The magnificent White Book was copied somewhere very near the middle of the fourteenth century, likely for Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd from Parcrhydderch in Ceredigion, and includes the collection that has since become known as the *Mabinogion*.⁷⁷⁷ The equally impressive Red Book of Hergest is dated by Daniel Huws to sometime between the last quarter of the fourteenth century and the turn of the fifteenth, copied at least in part by the scribe Hywel Fychan fab Hywel Goch of Buellt.⁷⁷⁸ In

⁷⁷⁶Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating narratives' p. 131.

⁷⁷⁷Huws, Daniel. *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth 2000) p. 228.

⁷⁷⁸Huws, *MWM* p. 82.

addition, two other fragments appear to pre-date the White Book by as much as half a century and these provide a tantalising but unrevealing glimpse into what is surely a fascinating textual history.⁷⁷⁹ Both of these are held in the National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 7, dating from around 1300, and Peniarth 14, also from the early fourteenth century.⁷⁸⁰ The differences between these earlier versions and those of the White and Red Books, which are by far the better-known, has led some scholars to consider the shorter variant incomplete beyond the defects of its manuscript witnesses.

The Peniarth 7 text begins in mid-sentence with the words '*reit ym wrthaw*' and ends with the declaration, '*ac y velly yt(er)vyna kynnyd paredur ap Efrawc*'.⁷⁸¹ While scholars originally suggested the end of the manuscript was missing as well as its beginning, Lloyd-Morgan argues that it is unfair to consider 'incomplete' what seems to have been a purposeful ending on the part of the redactor.⁷⁸² J. Gwenogvryn Evans suggests the text is written in an earlier hand than the rest of the manuscript⁷⁸³, while Huws is of the opinion that Peniarth 7 itself once comprised more than one book; the fact that some of the pages have been misplaced during later binding compounds, rather than clarifies, the issue.⁷⁸⁴ He conservatively dates the manuscript to around 1300, but by identifying the chief hand as one also found in a book addressed to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, to suggest a compilation prior to 1282 is certainly not impossible.⁷⁸⁵ This would further be in keeping with what we know of thirteenth-century Wales, and the attempts of the princes of Gwynedd to forge a unified Welsh heritage in the face of encroaching English expansion. Indeed, Aronstein

⁷⁷⁹Huws, *MWM*, p. 245.

⁷⁸⁰I use here the dates suggested by Daniel Huws. Two recent editions of the longer text, in Welsh only, are by Glenys Goetinck (Cardiff 1976) and Peter Wynn Thomas (Cardiff 2000, online); the most recent translation is by Sioned Davies (Cardiff 2000). An edition and translation of the shorter, Peniarth 7 and 14 versions was recently completed by Anthony Vitt (unpublished MPhil thesis, Aberystwyth 2011). Quotations are from Goetinck's version unless otherwise noted.

⁷⁸¹Vitt, Anthony M. *Peredur vab Efrawc*. (MPhil Thesis). Aberystwyth 2010, p. 7.

⁷⁸²Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen. 'Narrative structure in *Peredur*', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 38 (1980) 187-231' p. 194.

⁷⁸³Evans, J. Gwenogvryn. *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 2 vols. (London 1898-1910) vol. I, p. 317.

⁷⁸⁴Huws, *MWM*, pp. 245-6.

⁷⁸⁵Huws, Daniel. 'Y pedair llawysgrif ganoloesol', *Canhwyll Marchogyon Cyd-destunoli Peredur*, eds. Sioned Davies and Peter Wynn Thomas. (Cardiff: 2000) 1-9, p. 3.

suggests that longer, presumably later versions serve as a direct attempt to assimilate the ideals of the feudal court into a medieval Welsh context under Llywelyn ap Iorwerth,⁷⁸⁶ while Lloyd-Morgan observes that the existence of more than one version does not preclude multiple variants simultaneously existing in oral circulation.⁷⁸⁷ Knight takes this still further, proposing that the version of the tale found in Peniarth 7 may have provided the original source for Chrétien's romance.⁷⁸⁸

The second fragment is found in NLW manuscript Peniarth 14, a compilation of primarily religious works of which the *Peredur* fragment comes last. It is a secular work within a sacred collection, joining *Proffwydoliaeth Myrddin* alongside the *Ystoria Judas* and *Mabinogi Iesu Crist*.⁷⁸⁹ Huws suggests an early fourteenth-century date and an origin from a Cistercian order in north Wales.⁷⁹⁰ This seems in apposition with Peter Wynn Thomas's suggestion that early written evidence points to a redaction of the text having been made in north Wales by about 1275.⁷⁹¹ Indeed, there appear to have been more than one version in different times and locales which compete or conflict with each other, and which would have served different cultural functions depending on the audience and local context. Whilst *Peredur* seems like a particularly extreme case, this in itself is not necessarily an unusual situation; Lloyd-Morgan points to the *Ystoria Adaf*, which, as she says, includes one adaptation from a pre-1250 Latin original and one from an Anglo-Norman variant.⁷⁹²

The puzzle of the textual history of *Peredur* stems from the absence of some episodes in certain versions and the textual inconstancy of the narrative itself. The Peniarth 7 version, for instance, uses the word '*kynnyd*' rather than '*ystoria*', a word which Lloyd-Morgan observes can

786Aronstein, Susan. 'Becoming Welsh: counter-colonialism and the negotiation of native identity in *Peredur vab Efwrawc*', *Exemplaria* 17 (2005): 135-168, p. 149.

787Lloyd-Morgan, Ceridwen. 'Narrative structure' p. 194. That the final section of *Peredur* was added by a later redactor from an already complete text was first put forth by Mary Williams, *Essai sur la composition du roman gallois de Peredur* (Paris 1909) and responded to by Rudolf Thurneyson, 'Review of Mary Williams, *Essai sur la composition du roman gallois de Peredur*', *ZCP* 8 (1910-12) 185-89.

788Knight, Stephen. 'Resemblance and menace: A post-colonial reading of *Peredur*,' *Canhwyll Marchogyon: Cyd-destunoli Peredur*, S. Davies and P. W. Thomas, eds. (Cardiff 2000), 128-147, p. 143.

789Vitt, p. 7.

790Huws, Daniel. 'Y pedair llawysgrif canoloesol', p. 3-4.

791Thomas, Peter Wynn. *Peredur: Golygiad Lleiafol*. (Cardiff 2000) p. 41-2.

792Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating narratives', p. 130.

mean either 'progress' or, perfectly fitting for the situation, 'reign after conquest'.⁷⁹³ As this version of the tale ends with the hero's victory in the tournament and marriage to the Empress of Constantinople, the terminology seems especially apt. She suggests that if the Peniarth 7 version had existed for some time, even if only in oral circulation, without coming into direct contact with the White Book version, but both stemmed from the same original source romance, that this would explain the 'close parallels at the narrative level' while differences developed in the wording.⁷⁹⁴

To locate the protagonist within the corpus of historical and literary heroes in Wales and on the continent, it may be useful to consider the character's long and complex history within the Welsh tradition. The name Peredur itself is traditionally connected to the Middle Welsh word *par*, meaning spear: a line in *Y Gododdin* puns the name with *peri*, the plural form of *par*, and a 'fanciful etymology' offered in *Y Seint Graal* claims that he was called 'steel spear' because his father was engaged in a war at the time of his birth. Indeed, the alternate spellings of *Peredur* and *Paredur* were used interchangeably through much of the medieval period.⁷⁹⁵

Peredur son of Eliffer and his brother Gwrgi feature within the early sources concerning *yr Hen Ogledd*. They appear in the Harleian genealogies as sons of *Eleuther Cascord maur* ('Eliffer of the Great Retinue'), belonging to the lineage of Coel Hen. Triad 44, 'The Three Horses who Carried the Three Horse-Burdens', includes them in the second burden amongst the riders of Eliffer's horse, Cornan, and places them at the battle of Arfderydd.⁷⁹⁶ This is likely the tradition used by Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Peredurus dux Venedotorum* is an opponent of *Guennolous* (Gwenddolau) in an unnamed battle corresponding with Arfderydd; Peredur is one of the companions of Merlin in the *Vita Merlini* who try to bring him back to his senses.⁷⁹⁷ Bromwich notes that AD 573, the date given for the battle in the *Annales Cambriae*, is reasonably consistent with the death date of 580 listed for

⁷⁹³*ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 194.

⁷⁹⁵Bromwich *TYP3* p. 478

⁷⁹⁶*ibid.* p. 115

⁷⁹⁷Clarke, Basil. *The Life of Merlin* (Cardiff 1973) pp. 55-57. 'Solatur Peredurus cum proceresque decesque nec vult solari nec verba precantia ferre.'

the brothers in the genealogies.⁷⁹⁸ She also proposes that a misunderstanding of *y gogledd* may have been responsible for placing him in north Wales, rather than Yorkshire, as in the *rhamant*.⁷⁹⁹ The brothers' death is explained in Triad 30, 'The Three Faithless War-Bands of the Island of Britain', which claims they were meant to fight Eda Glinfawr at Caer Greu the following day, but were killed when their *gosgordd* abandoned them in the night.⁸⁰⁰ Triad 70, 'Three Blessed Womb-Burdens of the Isle of Britain', which also includes Owain ab Urien, lists Peredur and Gwrgi, along with their sister.⁸⁰¹ The brothers' presence together in such a variety of places implies a strong native tradition surrounding them before the *rhamant* was ever composed, though remarkably, one place Peredur does not appear is the court list of *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

Peredur also appears without his brother in Triad 8, 'The Three Prostrate (Humble) Chieftains of the Isle of Britain'.⁸⁰² Here he is mentioned in reference to his father and his son, who is the object of the triad itself: '*Gwga6n Gwron mab Peredur mab Elifer Gosgor(d)ua6r*', and now that we have assembled Peredur and his brother, their parents Eliffer and Efrddyl, and a son, the family tree begins to take shape. Here also, we have mention again of Eliffer's 'great retinue' and the implication that he lost his lands, an event which occurs in versions of *Peredur* as well. Nevertheless, Bromwich does not believe these figures to be one and the same, based on the early Peredur's being inseparable from his brother Gwrgi.⁸⁰³

It need not necessarily follow that the two Peredurs—one a northern British prince with a father called after a city, who has lost his land and all his sons; the other a northern British prince from the same general area with a brother and a father who has lost his lands — must be unconnected and in fact seems highly unlikely that one did not follow the other into the literary tradition. As with Owain ab Urien, whose historical persona has almost nothing in common with his

798Bromwich *TYP3* p. 481.

799*ibid.*

800Bromwich *TYP3* p. 66.

801Bromwich *TYP3* p. 195-8.

802Welsh: *Tri lledyf 6nben Enys Prydein*. Bromwich has further discussion on the term *lledyf*, which can also be translated as 'humble, downcast, yielding, unassuming' and seems to denote a person who is either unable or unwilling to mount a resistance after being deprived of lands. See *TYP3*, p. 17.

803Bromwich *TYP3* p. 481.

enduring literary one, the heroes of the Old North could be brought forward and thrown into the Arthurian orbit while some of the original histories, disattached, floated away unnoticed like debris in the tails of comets. Welsh literature is full of heroes whose names reappear whenever there is a use for them. And despite warning against over-conflating the two, Bromwich does concede that 'some faint recollection of dynastic traditions...may well lie behind...*Peredur*', and that an original version of the tale, focusing on the young hero's obligation to be avenge his father, may form the basis for the tale that eventually became bound up in the continental Grail materials.⁸⁰⁴ Half-remembered allusions are unreliable witnesses, however, and the texts that survive are the only ones we can examine. Certainly the two *Peredurs* were conflated by medieval writers fairly early on; an expanded entry in the fourteenth-century genealogies of Jesus MS 20 lists *Peredur* and his brother *Gwrgi* along with '*arthur penuchel*' in an abbreviated form of Triad 70.⁸⁰⁵

While the name *Peredur* has a long history in Welsh, its French cognate *Perceval* seems to never have appeared anywhere before Chrétien's composition of his verse romances *Erec*, *Cliges* and *Perceval* and appears to be a genuine French approximation of the British character. This sets him apart from the heroes of the other two *rhamantau*, who appear to have been selected from the catalogue of ancient Welsh heroes for the purpose of inclusion in an adapted tale, whether by Chrétien himself or by the Welsh redactors. Chrétien's version, *Le Conte du Graal*, is an incomplete poem of around 9000 lines; even in its unfinished state it is longer than the four verse romances preceding it. Written between 1181 and 1191, according to Lacy, it is dedicated to Chrétien's patron Philip of Flanders and allegedly based on a manuscript given by him to the poet.⁸⁰⁶ It cuts off in the middle of a line, but later authors took it upon themselves to finish the text, and added the Four Continuations, consisting of another 54,000 lines.⁸⁰⁷ Both Chrétien and the authors of the Continuations lose interest in the hero himself and the focus shifts to Gawain, though one of the

804Bromwich *TYP3* p. 479.

805Bromwich suggests this Arthur is in fact a corruption of 'Arddun pen Askell', the sister found in a previous triad, whose existence becomes subsumed within the ever-present, all-encompassing Arthurian milieu. See *TYP3* p. 198.

806Lacy, Norris J. 'Chrétien de Troyes' In Norris J. Lacy, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, pp. 88–91 (New York 1991)

807Grigsby, John L. 'Continuations of *Perceval*'. In Norris J. Lacy, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, pp. 99–100.

latter does end with Perceval succeeding to the throne of the Fisher King.⁸⁰⁸

The differences between *Conte del Graal* and *Peredur* are many, and a number of significant deviations in the narrative suggest *Peredur* is not entirely based on a continental version but may have had some life of its own already. The ambivalent relationship to the story's continental counterparts has led scholars to pore through its puzzles and complexities in the hopes of unearthing a verifiably pre-Chrétien, native text. As Aronstein observes, the stakes '...are high: the existence of a native literary tradition, the aesthetic integrity of Welsh literature, and...ownership of the Arthurian materials'.⁸⁰⁹ It is certainly easy enough to understand the desire to promote the value of the literature of a language for so long under threat, but at the same time it is important to examine the surviving texts not as immutable artefacts but as malleable literary creations in which aspects of both heroic and romantic genre are repurposed for a particular audience's 'horizon of expectations'.

The purpose of all this background material is to demonstrate the complex textual history of *Peredur*, because not only does the tale engage with discourses of chivalry, masculinity and colonisation, but the long and short versions occasionally conflict with each other. Susan Aronstein and Stephen Knight, following the post-colonial criticism of Homi Bhabha, have argued that the short version found in Peniarth 7 demonstrates a literary rejection of Welsh assimilation into the Anglo-Norman court, while the longer, presumably later versions act as part of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's attempts to integrate a centralised feudal government in a united twelfth-century Wales.⁸¹⁰ While their discussion centres around a particular post-colonial narrative rather than a gendered one, it is impossible to escape the premise that gender – the location of male and female and the construction of conflicting masculinities – remains crucial to the interpretation of the text. Likewise, the post-colonial (or rather, colonial, for as Knight and McMullen have both observed, *Peredur's* textual development occurred within an ongoing colonial process) concerns presented by the

808Grigsby, p. 99-100.

809Aronstein, 'Becoming Welsh', p. 139.

810Aronstein, 'Becoming Welsh', and Knight, Stephen. 'Resemblance and Menace', *passim*. See also Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', *The Location of Culture*, ed. Bhabha (London and New York 1994) 85-92.

competing models of heroic and chivalric manhood within the narrative must necessarily inform any thorough analysis of gender.⁸¹¹ With its two contrasting versions of the same tale, *Peredur*, even more than *Owain* and *Geraint*, can be seen engaging with, deconstructing and reassembling the romance genre on its own terms.

As in *Geraint*, the model of masculinity promoted in *Peredur* appears straightforwardly chivalric at a first, superficial glance, but the text betrays itself by destabilising its hero's masculine identity and, indeed, his physical location. While unlike *Geraint*, the protagonist of *Peredur* is coded as young, rather than as inexcusably feminine, he too must be removed from the sedentary confine of an inactive and effeminate court in order to reach the culmination of his adult manhood. That none of the courts he visits, including the one he comes to rule, are apparently able to hold him can be seen as an expression of an innate warrior masculinity and rejection of this space, coded as feminine but also, potentially, as chivalric and foreign.⁸¹² His encounters are pulled from both native and continental traditions, and his marriage to the Empress of Constantinople is often considered even by the skeptical to be a rationalised version of the sovereignty motif.⁸¹³ The women of the tale serve as arbiters and mediators of the hero's identity and can often be seen reflecting a landscape populated by young maidens in need of succour, so familiar to readers of medieval romance. This landscape appears to reflect a feminine space, with masculine martiality present only in an aggressive role; meanwhile Aronstein suggests this landscape represents a native Wales kept separate from Arthur's Anglo-Norman court.⁸¹⁴

This chapter will discuss the location of *Peredur* within his world: the significance of his bloodline, especially in relation to the work on kinship ties by Charles-Edwards, his brief stay in

811 Knight, p. 129. McMullen, A. Joseph, 'The communication of culture: speech and the "grail" procession in *Peredur vab Efrog*', *Arthuriana* 23:3 (2013), 27-43, p. 34.

812 Aronstein, 'Becoming Welsh', and Knight, 'Resemblance and menace' both deal with this in some depth.

813 See Lovecy, Ian, 'The Celtic sovereignty theme and the structure of *Peredur*', *Studia Celtica* 12-13 (1977-8) 133-46; Glenys Goetinck, 'The female characters in *Peredur*', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1996) 378-86; Goetinck, 'Peredur: Upon reflection', *Études Celtiques* 25 (1988) 221-32. For the single alternative suggestion as to the Empress' inspiration, see Natalia Petrovskaja, 'Dating *Peredur*: New light on old problems', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 29 (2009): 223-243.

814 Aronstein, 'Native identity', p. 153.

Arthur's court, and his peripatetic existence through a liminal and supernatural countryside. I will also investigate the role of female characters – Peredur's mother, the witches of Caerloyw, and the Empress – in constructing and bestowing the hero's masculine identity. Briefly I will address potential aspects of sovereignty within the narrative and the character of the Empress, and finally explain how the long version of *Peredur* reconciles its many facets into a satisfyingly hybrid text.

While *Peredur*'s structure is complex, often symmetrical (in the same way as *Culhwch*) and includes episodes in which the beginning and the conclusion are separated by a large margin, the text is nevertheless divisible into three chief segments – if including the final section with the Black Maiden. Each of these sections is marked by a larger capital letter in the manuscript, and by a locative or descriptive statement describing the characters.⁸¹⁵ Satoko Ito, in a 1989 PhD thesis, labels these sections the *Mabinogi* – in its literal sense, that being the childhood deeds of the hero; the Test, in which Peredur accomplishes feats of heroism and proves himself a warrior and *marchog*; and the *Tynged*, in which he completes his eventual final task.⁸¹⁶

The first section deals with the hero's training and the preliminary construction of his warrior identity. The story opens with Peredur as a boy, living in the woods with his mother. As is almost universal in medieval Welsh tales, the very first thing the author does is to explain just who this young man is and where he comes from: '*Efrawc iarll bioed iarllaeth yn y Gogled, a seith meib oed idaw*'.⁸¹⁷ Automatically the audience is acquainted with the hero's father, rank, and homeland, but '*yn y gogled(d)*' also effectively locates him in time. By the thirteenth century when this was written down, and indeed even if it were composed as much as a century earlier, the medieval Welsh audience will have understood this to be a story of the Old North, and seemed not to have any particular difficulty moving the court of Arthur through times as it suited. Indeed, Arthur seems to

815There have been a number of suggestions for dividing the text of *Peredur*, each with a different purpose in mind. Thurneyson divides the text into four sections, mostly based on the rubrication in the Red and White Books but splitting the first part into I(a) and I(b). Goetinck divides the tale into four main parts, Knight and Lloyd-Morgan into five, and Bollard into twenty-eight episodes.

816Ito, Satoko. *The Three Romances and the Four Branches: Their Narrative Structure and Relationship with Welsh Lore* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Aberystwyth 1989) p. 141.

817Goetinck, Glenys. *Historia Peredur vab Efrawc: Golygydd gyda Rhagymadrodd Nodiadau Testunol a Geirfa* (Cardiff 1976) p. 7.

have represented a 'golden age' of whatever land he was imported to, and the ancient golden age most familiar to the medieval Welsh poets was the era of post-Roman northern Britain.⁸¹⁸

The other reason for beginning with the name of the hero's father, of course, is that it provides the necessary explanation for why this young man is destined for greatness. Valour was seen to be inherited and innate; the first prerequisite for a young squire was being born into the right family. There are two distinct but related threads at work here, the Celtic and the continental, but this is not especially surprising as medieval Europe as a general rule was preoccupied with kinship ties. From the earliest days of recorded Celtic law in both Wales and Ireland, the family was paramount; we have seen this already in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. A traveller in early Ireland would want to be able to claim the protection of the local chieftain as soon as possible, for once he left the jurisdiction of his own family he ceased to have any legal rights at all. In Wales, court cases were always decided by the testimony of 'men of character', and that character was determined by standing in the local community based on a complex maze of family ties.⁸¹⁹ To belong to the right court and the right family was to have legal recourse and support in a culture where civil war was a common pastime.

The importance of family was not only true in the Celtic world, of course, and while the convention of opening hero-stories with their protagonists' lineage is a Welsh favourite – three of the Four Branches open with an explanation of who the characters are – continental romance certainly concerns itself with these matters as well. Even at the end of the middle ages in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Lancelot refuses to make Gareth a knight before knowing 'of what kyn ye be borne'.⁸²⁰ The blood is the overriding factor, and illegitimacy itself is not necessarily a barrier to nobility, as evidenced most obviously by the dubious circumstances resulting in the conception of Arthur himself. If the greatest king of all time could be essentially a bastard child born of a

818Haycock, Marged. 'Early Welsh poets look north', *Beyond Y Gododdin*, ed. Alex Woolf (St Andrews 2013) 9-40 *passim*.

819Ellis, Thomas Peter. *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom* (Oxford 1926, repr. Darmstadt 1982) vol. 2, p. 326f.

820Malory, 7:127 *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, Eugene Vinaver (ed. and trans.) (Oxford 1947) p. 299.

deceptive union, then surely the innate nobility of blood had the potential, at least, to overcome other obstacles. The issue of legitimacy was even less important in Wales, especially prior to first quarter of the thirteenth century. A son was considered to be legitimate if recognised by his father, regardless of the marital status of his parents, and Welsh succession was full of conflicts between legitimate and illegitimate sons through much of its history. Only after Llewelyn ap Iorwerth named his one legitimate son Dafydd as his sole heir, sometime between 1212 and 1220 – laying the seeds for the later rebellion of his older natural sons – that legitimacy entered the discourse of medieval Welsh inheritance in any real way.⁸²¹

The capacity for knighthood in sons of noble families may be innate, but as we have seen in *Owain* and *Geraint*, our heroes must still prove themselves worthy. For Peredur, and his French alter ego Perceval, the first step in his development is to escape the supervision of his mother. Chrétien is particularly harsh in this regard, and his view on the influence of a mother on her sons dim indeed. In his version, the lady actively tries to prevent her child from becoming a knight and leaving to be killed as his brothers were, and to this end specifically avoids teaching him about chivalry and courtly society. The Welsh text is more understanding, and explicitly refers to Peredur's mother as a '*gwreic kymen*' (wise woman) who knows her son will be the target of their enemies and takes him away from his hereditary lands to protect him; Aronstein says she 'makes a considered political move aimed at the preservation of territory', and that her refusal to allow knights into the realm is not a result of wilful neglect of his warrior education nor a fear that he will be killed, but rather that contact with the colonising forces will cause him to identify himself as one of them.⁸²² However, the neglect of his masculine, warrior self is a substantial failure, on her part, in her duties toward her son as transmitter of proper codes of behaviour. It may also be a reaction to Chrétien's text, in which she tells her son not to claim publicly that he was educated by his mother, suggesting such training for a young knight-to-be would have been considered culturally inappropriate in a

⁸²¹Pryce, Huw. *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120-1283* (Cardiff 2005) pp. 414-5.

⁸²²Aronstein, 'Becoming Welsh', p. 154.

French context. Whatever the case may have been in France, in early Britain there is evidence that the mother, much like the women of Sparta, bears the responsibility for the transmission of the heroic ethos. Particularly, in *Pais Dinogad*, one of the *gorchanau* attached to *Y Gododdin*, the mother-narrator instructs her son through a lullaby. By telling the boy about his late father's virtues, his excellence at hunting and weaponry, but also by her own quiet acceptance of the situation, she provides him with a lesson on what it is to be a man in the Old British North.⁸²³ A mother's influence on her son can also be deleterious, of course, in Welsh texts — the *tynged* fixed on Lleu Llaw Gyffes by his mother Aranrhod in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, or on Culhwch by his stepmother, shows just how much power she might have to deprive her son of an adult life. Peredur's mother, however, might be more closely compared with the wife of Custennin the shepherd in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, who keeps her youngest son hidden in a cupboard because his twenty-four elder brothers have been slain by Ysbaddaden. In that case as well, the innate nobility of the child's warrior character is ultimately unassailable: he becomes one of Arthur's knights, avenges his brothers by killing Ysbaddaden, and is even called Goreu ('best') by the members of his company.

This is the education Peredur does not receive; when his mother does let him leave it is because her son's fate has come to find him and she has no choice. This has a certain fairy tale feel: the young man, raised in the woods by his widowed mother, leaves her to travel to Arthur's court and become a knight. Before he goes, she provides him with a long list of advice, which he takes very much to heart:

Yn y gwelych eglwys, can dy pater wrthi. O gwely vwyt a diawt, o byd reit it wrthaw ac na bo o wybot a dayoni y rodi it, kymer tu hun ef. O chlywy diaspat dos wrthi, a diaspat gwreic anat diaspat o'r byt. O gwely tlws rec, kymer ti euo a dyro titheu y arall, ac o hynny clot a geffy. O gwely gwreic tec, gordercha hi kyn ny'th vynho. Gwell gwr a ffenedigach y'th wna no chynt.⁸²⁴

823 Haycock, Marged. "Defnydd hyd Ddydd Brawd": rhai agweddau ar y ferch ym marddoniaeth yr oesoedd canol', *Cymru a'r Cymry 2000: Trafodion Cynhadledd Milflwyddiant Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru*, Geraint Jenkins, ed. (Aberystwyth 2001) 41-70, p. 44.

824 Goetinck, *Peredur*, pp. 9-10. 'Wherever you see a church, chant the Our Father to it. If you see food and drink, if you are in need of it and no one has the courtesy or goodness to offer it to you, help yourself. If you hear a scream, go towards it, and a woman's scream above any other scream in the world. If you see a fair jewel, take it and give it to someone else, and because of that you will be praised. If you see a beautiful lady, make love to her even though

Some of this is good advice, some of it is ethically questionable. The admonition about making love is especially suspect, and led Brynley Roberts to suggest that this section represented an outsider's view of the tenets of chivalry: that as a woman and not a knight herself, Peredur's mother's understanding of its rules is imperfect, and that an author might use this in an ironic fashion to describe how the lifestyle of a knight-errant could appear to outsiders.⁸²⁵ For Ito this marks out the asociality of their wilderness retreat, which, being kept apart from the civilised spaces of the court, abides by no behavioural codes.⁸²⁶ Meanwhile Bollard suggests an alternative reading. The Welsh text in the White Book manuscript is '*O g6ely g6reic tec, gordercha hi. Kyn ny'th vynho, g6ell g6r a ffenedigach y'th 6na no chynt*'.⁸²⁷ One of the problems faced by the translator here is '*gordderchu*', a word with a list of definitions covering a fairly wide range of degrees of sexual activity, from 'woo' or 'entice' to 'ravish'.⁸²⁸ The exact tone of Peredur's mother's advice, then, is not entirely clear from the language. Furthermore punctuation is always problematic in these situations, mostly by its absence; should the '*kyn ny'th vynho*' be read with the preceding or following phrase? Bollard suggests translating the passage as, 'If you see a fair woman, court her. Though she may not desire you, a better and more fervent man it will make you than before.'⁸²⁹

This suggested translation, appealingly, brings the mother's advice into line with the accepted expectations of a chivalric hero without requiring either ignorance or actual sexual aggression on the part of the character, or satire on that of the author. It is also interesting that while Peredur's mother encourages him to be a lover, the French mother of Chrétien's Perceval expressly forbids it:

De pucele a molt qui le baise.
S'ele le baisier vos consent,
Le surplus je vos en desfent,

she does not want you--it will make you a better and braver man than before.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 66.

825Roberts, Brynley. 'Tales and romances.' *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, eds. AOH Jarman and GR Hughes (1976), 203-243 p. 226.

826Ito, *Three Romances*, p. 143.

827Thomas, *Peredur*, T76.

828'gordderchu.' GPC (Cardiff 2006) p. 2818.

829Bollard, J.K. 'Theme and meaning in *Peredur*', *Arthuriana* 10:3 (2000) p. 82.

Se laissier le volez por moi.

(If you obtain a kiss from a maiden, she will give much more. But if she does agree to this kiss, I forbid you what may ensue; please, for me, renounce it.)⁸³⁰

The advice itself given to Peredur by his mother is essentially a childhood primer, a nursery-school version of a more nuanced adult code that comprises parts of both the chivalric ideal and the heroic one. Bollard explains it thus:

The vocabulary and content of the mother's speech reflect at least some of the qualities a knight should possess, simplified and summarized for her innocent and somewhat impetuous son, whose blood begins to tell as soon as he sets eyes on three of Arthur's knights.⁸³¹

Peredur, despite his apparent strength and size, is at this point in the text still a child, and ideally his development over the course of the tale will lead to a deeper adult understanding of the practical application of his mother's words. He sets out on his journey, equipped in a child's imitation of the gear he has seen the knights carry, an image Chrétien uses in his poem to poke fun at the ignorant, Welsh country bumpkin attempting to find a place in the sophisticated (French) court. On the way to the court, as he marches along playing at being a knight with twisted willow branches made into armour, he has an odd encounter with a lady in a clearing. He tells her his mother's words, and she politely lets him take food from her table and a ring from her hand.

Goetinck believes this to be the first of several episodes in which helpful Otherworld figures assist the hero in his development and his quest.⁸³² Lloyd-Morgan marks it as the beginning of his development and a 'practical example' of his mother's 'hit and miss' teaching.⁸³³ From Peredur's point of view, it means everyone is behaving exactly as they ought. He's done what his mother told him, the maiden has been suitably generous, and he can consider his first real encounter with a stranger outside his home a success. This encounter is considerably different in the Welsh version than in Chrétien (there are, however, a number of continuations of *Conte del Graal* by other writers, some of which bear more resemblance to *Peredur* than others), in which the maiden cries, resists,

830Chrétien, *Perceval*, lns 546-549 Trans. Kirk McElhearn, 2001

<<http://www.mcelhearn.com/perceval-or-the-story-of-the-grail-by-chretien-de-troyes/>> [accessed 5 Dec 2015].

831Bollard, J.K. 'Theme and Meaning', p. 79.

832Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 146.

833Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 198.

and begs the young intruder to leave her, her virtue, and her jewellery alone. This may suggest Goetinck is right in suggesting that a latent sovereignty theme is at play in the Welsh version, but may also stem from a Welsh focus on hospitality and the role of noblewoman as hostess – mead-bearer, patron of the arts, and giver of gifts to strangers. It certainly introduces the continuing theme, throughout the text, of the young male knight travelling through an overwhelmingly feminine landscape. This is another way his mother might be compared to that of Gorau in *Culhwch*: she is part, not of a civilised and sophisticated court, but a supernatural and Otherworldly landscape located outside the influence of Arthur and his people.

When Peredur reaches Arthur's court, he witnesses an encounter between another stranger and the court that also provides a contrast to his own attempt at proper courtly behaviour. In a subversion of the motif of the *bel inconnu*, in the form of an intruder straight out of Irish myth and identifiable with the green knight of the later English *Sir Gawaine*, the young newcomer Peredur witnesses an interruption to the smooth running of the court:

A chyn y dyfot ef y lys Arthur, ef a doeth marchawc arall y'r llys ac a rodes modrwy eur vras y dyn yn y porth yr dala y varch. Ac ynteu a doeth racdaw y'r neuad yn yd oed Arthur a'e teulu a Gwenhwyfar a'e rianed, a gwas ystauell yn gwasanaethu o orflwch ar Wenhwyfar. A'r marchawc a gymerth y gorflwch o law Wenhwyfar ac a dineuis y llyn oed yndaw am y hwyneb a'e bronfoll, a rodi bonclust mawr y Wenwhyfar.⁸³⁴

Where in *Geraint*, Gwenhwyfar was insulted on behalf of her maiden, here the assault on her person is unmediated. Furthermore, she does not react herself, but is passive and silent. Not only is this at odds with the behaviour of the vibrant heroines of the Four Branches, who would surely have had sharp words for the offender, but it is another departure from *Perceval*, where the wine spilling is actually an accident, but such a 'dreadful deed' that 'the queen returned to her chambers, in deadly fury and grief'.⁸³⁵ Cichon suggests an implicit sexual element to the crime, based on the symbolism of the cup and splashed wine as representative of both sovereignty and the ruptured virginal hymen,

⁸³⁴Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 12. '...before he arrived...another knight came to the court and gave a thick gold ring to a man at the gate to hold his horse. And he himself proceeded into the hall where Arthur and his retinue were, and Gwenhwyfar and her maidens, and a chamberlain serving Gwenhwyfar from a goblet. And the knight grabbed the goblet from Gwenhwyfar's hand and poured the drink that was in it over her face and breast, and gave her a great clout on the ear. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 68.

⁸³⁵Chrétien, *Arthurian Romances*, p. 393.

and the ambiguous nature of the word 'camarferu', glossed by Jenkins as both 'obstructing' and 'lying with' another man's wife.⁸³⁶ This, he argues, gives the encounter an understood element of the adultery usually missing from Welsh Arthurian texts, and that 'the offense in the narrative surpasses simply cuckoldry, because in Arthur's case at least symbolically, the insult calls into question his right to rule, over and above threatening his manhood.'⁸³⁷

Goetinck equates the intruder with Balor of Irish myth, and also interprets the seizing of the cup as a symbolic usurpation of Arthur's lands.⁸³⁸ When considered alongside *Conte del Graal* and *Sir Perceval*, in which the stranger presents himself explicitly as a legitimate claimant and challenger to Arthur's right to rule, the scene does appear to represent a coded but all-out assault on Arthur's kingship – which reflects even more poorly on the lack of action on his part, and that of his warriors. In *Peredur*, the knight's actions are necessarily deliberate with specific legal implications: the *Cyfraith Hywel* specified that a queen was legally insulted if she was struck, or had something grabbed from her hand.⁸³⁹ Robin Chapman Stacey has observed that this act seems 'oddly specific' and seems more designed to precipitate action than as an offence in and of itself.⁸⁴⁰ Meanwhile Michael Cichon argues that such deliberate action 'reveals a symbolic or mythic sensitivity...not likely dismissed' as the instigation of a purposeful feud.⁸⁴¹ The intruder does exactly what is called for, no more and no less, to commit a legally punishable crime against Gwenhwyfar and so shame any of the knights present who do not rise to defend her.

That none of them do creates an unfortunate situation which necessitates action on the part of the naïve hero but certainly shows Arthur's established knights in an especially negative light. For Arthur himself, Cichon suggests that his is 'an impossible situation...if he makes a riposte

836Cichon, Michael. 'Mishandled Vessels: Heaving Drinks and Hurling Insults in Medieval Welsh Literature and Law'. *Canadian Journal of History* 43 (2008), 227-240, p. 232; Dafydd Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda* (Llandysul 1986) p. 221.

837Cichon, 'Mishandled vessels', p. 232.

838Goetinck, Glenys. *Peredur: a Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff 1975) p. 137 (hereafter *Peredur(b)*).

839Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 246.

840Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'King, Queen and Edling in the laws of the court.' *The Welsh King and His Court*, T.M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen, and Paul Russell, eds. (Cardiff: UWP, 2000) 29-62, p. 36.

841Cichon, 'Mishandled vessels', p. 231.

directly he acknowledges the stranger as an equal, but non-action further heightens the perception of impotence'.⁸⁴² It is worth noting, however, that Arthur's own abilities are restricted whilst occupying interior space, and that in all three of the *rhamantau* (and by allusion in *Culhwch ac Olwen*) he is only able to act upon leaving the court itself. In *Owein* and *Peredur* in particular, he is useless inside the court itself – in *Owein* he falls asleep at the dinner table while in *Peredur* he can only stand by while his wife and his own sovereignty are challenged. That Welsh literature cautions against inactive kings who remain within their own halls is not exclusive to Arthur, however. After all, the iconic Welsh lord Math ap Mathonwy 'ny bydei uyw, namyn tra uei y deudroet y[m] mlyc croth morwyn, onyd kynwryf ryuel a'y llesteirei'.⁸⁴³ Arthur's life may not depend on his proximity to a virgin footholder, but he certainly feels the detrimental effects of too much time indoors and away from such martial suits as battles, hunting trips, and searching the length and breadth of his land for his errant squires.

This does not excuse the knights, however. While Chrétien explains that the men of the court are all recently back from battle, still wounded and exhausted, the Welsh text offers no such allowances. It challenges the masculinity of the *teulu* by suggesting, rather, that the men of the court are all afraid of the presumed might of an intruder with the audacity to attack the Queen in her own dining room: 'yn tebic ganthunt na wnaei neb kyfryw gyflauan a honno, namyn o vot arnaw milwryaeth ac angerd neu hut a lletrith, mal na allei neb ymdiala ac ef'.⁸⁴⁴ This image appears in such stark contrast to the headstrong warriors of *Culhwch ac Olwen* that it is no surprise when Aronstein finds in this depiction a post-colonial reclamation of heroic Welsh identity and rejection of Anglo-Norman usurpation. She says that *Peredur*,

who is associated with the Old North and the warriors of the Welsh heroic age, will...find nothing of value in Arthur's Anglo-Norman court. Instead, he must resist the hollow attractions of that court – where "splendor or reputation is not...supported by action" – and accept instead the identity

⁸⁴²*ibid.* p. 237.

⁸⁴³Hughes, Ian. *Math uab Mathonwy* (Dublin 2013) p. 1. 'Math ap Mathonwy could not live unless his feet were in the lap of a virgin, except when the turmoil of war prevented him.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 47.

⁸⁴⁴Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 12. '...they assumed that no one would commit such a crime unless he possessed strength and power or magic and enchantment so that no one could wreak vengeance on him.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 68.

conferred on him in the Wild Wastes of Wales.⁸⁴⁵

In Peredur's arrival and departure from the court, then, we see the conflict between two opposing constructions of martial masculinity. However, the court itself may be to blame for the emasculating effect on the warriors, being, as we have seen already, not only coded as feminine but clearly a place of extreme inaction. In the opening scene of *Owain* Arthur actually falls asleep at the dinner table, in *Geraint* the court is the central locus for masculine anxieties, and in *Peredur*, as Ito notes, the apparent tranquillity is so vulnerable it is subject to attack three times within the first section of the narrative alone.⁸⁴⁶ No great renown can be won within the walls of Caerleon itself, and Peredur, like the heroes of the other two *rhamantau*, must venture out into the wilderness to prove himself and claim his adult warrior identity.

It is not only Peredur himself who illustrates the tension between this active, heroic, native masculinity and a passive, courtly (and according to Aronstein, Anglo-Norman) one; Cai is an equally ambivalent figure ill-suited to his presents in the ostensibly chivalric court. Owain chides him for his behaviour to Peredur and the dwarves:

'Dioer,' heb yr Owein vab Vryen wrth Kei, 'drwc y medreist am dyn fol a yrreist yn [ol] y marchawc. Ac vn o deu ar deryw, ac uwrw ae lad. Os y uwrw ryderyw, eiryf gwr mwyn a uyd arnaw gan y marchawc ac aglot tragywydawl y Arthur a'e vilwyr. Os y lad a deryw, yr aglot van kynt a gertha, a'e bechawt arnat titheu yn achwanec. Ac ny chattwyf i vy wyneb onyt af i y wybot py gyfranc a deryw idaw.'⁸⁴⁷

This recalls a similar conversation between Cai and Arthur in *Culhwch ac Olwen* on the nature of nobility and generosity, and it will not be the first time in this text that Cai behaves in a manner ill-befitting a chivalric knight. Cai, the personification of the old-fashioned, homosocial-heroic native British hero, is an ill fit for a medieval court in the continental mould that has found a new reverence for chivalry and courtly manners. Gowans suggests that his function in *Peredur* and

845Aronstein, Susan. 'Becoming Welsh', p. 153; includes Siân Echard. 'Of Parody and Perceval: Middle Welsh and middle English manipulations of the Perceval story', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 40 (1996), 63-81, p. 71.

846Ito, *Three Romances*, p.143.

847Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 13. 'God knows,' said Owain son of Urien to Cai, 'you behaved badly toward that foolish man you sent after the knight. And one of two things has happened, either he has been overthrown or killed. If he has been overthrown, the knight will consider him a nobleman, and Arthur and his warriors will be eternally disgraced. If he has been killed, they will still be disgraced, but more than that, it will have been your fault. And I will lose all face unless I go out and find out what has happened to him.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 69.

Owain of sending untried younger knights out on adventures stems from 'an exaggerated concern for the honour of Arthur's court' and a genuine wish to see them achieve lasting honour and fame.⁸⁴⁸ *Owain's* own interpretation of manners presents an interesting dilemma, as he, like the other knights in *Caerleon*, did not attempt to deal with the intruder or avenge the Queen himself. His concerns here seem twofold: that they be seen to have sent a useless young man to his death, and that they be thought to count in their number a real knight who makes armour out of branches and rides an old nag, and really cannot be said to embody the appearance or demeanour of a courtly knight. Neither of these outcomes would reflect well on Arthur or his companions. In *Conte du Graal*, the object of the would-be hero's ridiculous attire is clearly to make fun of the country yokel trying to take his place amongst the civilised and sophisticated knights of a French court which is not at all impressed by his Welsh country ways; it says at one point that:

Sire, sachiez bien entresait
Que Galois sont tot par nature
Plus fol que bestes en pasture

(Be aware, my Lord, that Welshmen are, by their own nature, more foolish than any beasts of the field.)⁸⁴⁹

Peredur, however, treats its hero as a child more than a bumpkin, conscious of both his youth and lack of education. As in the opening of *Geraint*, the hero is presently unable to present credentials with which to establish his masculine pre-eminence and his journey outside the court enables his identity to shape and stabilise. Always lurking under the surface of his description is the knowledge that he *will* become one of Arthur's best knights, once he has become educated in proper courtly behaviour.

The remainder of this section of the narrative deals with precisely this education, beginning with a lesson in the nature of armour itself. *Peredur's* first encounter with a warrior occurs early, around forty lines into the text, when he meets *Owain*, *Gwalchmai* and *Gwair* in the forest. At this point he exists in near-complete ignorance, requiring explanations of even very basic things.

⁸⁴⁸Gowans, Linda, *Cei and the Arthurian Legend* (Woodbridge 1988) p. 91.

⁸⁴⁹Chrétien, *Perceval*, ll. 242-244, trans Kirk McElhearn, 2001

<<http://www.mcelhearn.com/perceval-or-the-story-of-the-grail-by-chretien-de-troyes/>> [accessed 5 Dec 2015].

'Na wn,' heb ynteu, 'peth yw marchawc.'
 'Y ryw beth wyf inheu,' heb yr Owein. [...]
 'Beth yw [hwn]?' heb ef y'r kyfrwy.
 'Kyfrwy,' heb yr Owein.

Gofyn a wnaeth Peredur beth oed pob peth, a pheth a uynnit ac a ellit ac wynt. Owein a venegis idaw ynteu yn llwyr beth oed pob peth ac a ellit ohonaw.⁸⁵⁰

In his mother's quest to keep Peredur from becoming a knight, she has gone to some length to keep him ignorant not only of a warrior's function, but also the warrior's equipment which make up the tools of his trade and thereby become incorporated into his physical self. There are horses in their woodland home, but he has never seen a saddle – the horses are, the text says, used for carrying firewood, and it is the best of these which Peredur takes with him to Arthur's court. Even Peredur's limited understanding can see, when he departs his maternal home, that it is the trappings of the knight – the armour, the saddle, the weapons – which are necessarily integral to this identity, and to this end attempts to imitate them with the tools at his disposal: twisted branches. It is a child's game, the way a wooden toy sword might precede learning to use a real one, but it is also an earnest attempt, and an acknowledgement that the role of a warrior depends on a specific set of tools. Faletra notes that in *Perceval*, this is displayed as part of the character's uncourtly Welshness, that a 'young and reckless Perceval mistakes the first knights he sees for God and his Angels, ignores their questions out of distracted curiosity about their weapons...and imagines a world in which men and beasts alike might be born wearing chain mail.'⁸⁵¹ His clothes are '*a la guise de Gales*' and his Welsh identity is treated as a kind of running joke.⁸⁵² Unsurprisingly, this element is absent from *Peredur*.

Owain's explanations are not finished after leaving Peredur in the forest, for after the boy's arrival in the court he will again be responsible for instructing him in the ways of the knight. After chiding Cai on his behaviour he checks on Peredur, only to find him dragging the body of the defeated intruder, armour and all. Peredur, despite his victory, does not understand the distinction

850Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 8-9. "I don't know what a knight is," he replied. "The same as myself," said Owain. [...] "What is that?" he said, pointing to the saddle. "A saddle," said Owain. Peredur asked what everything was, and what it was intended for, and how it was used. Owain told him in detail what everything was and how it was used.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 66.

851Faletra, *Wales and the Colonial Imagination*, p. 99.

852Chrétien, *Perceval*, lns 500-501 Trans. Kirk McElhearn, 2001

<<http://www.mcelhearn.com/perceval-or-the-story-of-the-grail-by-chretien-de-troyes/>> [accessed 22 June 2015].

between the knight and his trappings:

Ac yna y doeth Owein racdaw parth a'r weirglawd, a phan daw yd oed Peredur yn lluscaw y gwr yn y ol ar hyt y weirglawd.

'A unben,' heb yr Owein, 'aro. Mi a diosglaf yr arueu.'

'Ny daw byth,' heb y Peredur, 'y peis hayarn hon y amdanaw. Ohonaw e hun yd henyw.'

Yna a dioscles Owein yr arueu a'r dillat.

'Llyma itti, eneit,' heb ef, 'weithon march ac arueue gwell no'r rei ereill. A chymer yn llawen wynt a dyret gyt a mi ar Arthur, a'th vrdaw yn varchawc urdawl a gehy.'⁸⁵³

In the forest, it had been the shining armour which first attracted the young Peredur's attention and caused him to ask his mother about the men wearing it; the same bright metal is the reason she suggested they were angels. Peredur's entire introduction to knighthood was via an introduction to *things*, defined and described for him by Owain, who told him a 'marchawc' was 'beth wyf inheu', a man like himself – distinguished in Peredur's eyes from the old and emasculated men of his mother's home by armour, tack, and weapons. Therefore, Peredur's association of the material with the warrior identity is, in his naivete, now so absolute that he believes the armour to be a literal part of the knight's body. Furthermore, his entrance into the ranks of the knightly class is symbolised and almost entirely dependant on his acquisition of the necessary objects by challenging another warrior for them: Owain gives him the armour of his defeated foe and suggests this is enough for him to be named a knight of the Arthur's court. This appears not to include a training or educational component, although one is clearly needed, and this is what the young hero must undertake away from the court itself.

Peredur embarks upon a journey of martial improvement which demonstrates his strength and potential as a warrior and, according to Goetinck, gives the Otherworld ample opportunity to help him on his way.⁸⁵⁴ It is hardly necessary, however, to consider the variety of ladies that Peredur succours as representatives of a sovereignty theme, especially as, with a single exception, they do

⁸⁵³Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 15. 'Then Owain made his way to the meadow. And when he arrived Peredur was dragging the man behind him along the meadow. "Lord," said Owain, "wait. I will remove the armour." "This iron tunic will never come off," said Peredur. "It is part of him." Then Owain removed the armour and the clothing. "Here you are, friend," he said, "now you have a horse and armour that are better than those you had. Take them gladly and come with me to Arthur, and you will be ordained a knight.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 70. The word *enaid*, while reliably translated as a term of address meaning 'friend', can bear a connotation of a senior or superior speaking to a younger, feminine or socially inferior person: see Gwydion speaking to Gilfaethwy in the Fourth Branch; Dafydd ap Gwilym 'Trafferth mewn Tafarn'; GPC def. 4 ('enaid' <http://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>).

⁸⁵⁴Goetinck, *Peredur(b)*, p. 130.

not result in his taking possession of a land or crown. Rather it may be more productive to follow Ito's suggestion that the wilderness through which Peredur travels serves as an extension of his maternal abode.⁸⁵⁵ She notes that it is a landscape populated exclusively by women, young boys, and old men, where other masculine warrior figures are positioned only as aggressors. This is of particular interest as it opposes the usual construction of external space as primarily masculine, and traps the knights, as exemplars of adult masculinity, within the female, domestic space of the court. In this instance both exterior and interior space are characterised as feminine, with male figures either trapped inside it, or seeking actively to penetrate it.

His journey gives Peredur ample opportunity to prove himself the defender of wronged women, in keeping with his mother's instructions, but it also provides a testing-ground for masculine supremacy in which these aggressive peripatetic knights-errant can battle each other. As Peredur rides around the countryside fighting with every new knight he encounters and sending them back to Caerleon, we see the same compulsion that occurred in *Geraint*, in which defeat has rules attached and the defeated knights are compelled or honour-bound to agree to whatever demands the victor places upon them.

In such a situation, in which male *marchogion* are rivals and aggressors rather than transmitters of their own social and behavioural codes, Peredur's education is carried out entirely by Other – and perhaps Otherworldly – beings. The two uncles whose courts he visits are both old men, past their martial prime, and one is lame; neither presents a real physical challenge to the wandering young man. These courts, like the forest refuge of Peredur's mother, are occupied only by those who fall outside the warrior masculine model: old men, young boys, and women. Ito sees this as representative of a feminine Otherworld through which the hero travels, while Aronstein suggests it reflects a native Wales kept active and distant from the ineffective and sedentary Anglo-Norman court.⁸⁵⁶ Peredur's stay there is liminal; it is also temporary.

⁸⁵⁵Ito, *Three Romances*, p. 144.

⁸⁵⁶Ito, *Three Romances*, p. 144ff, Aronstein, 'Native identity', p. 153.

His training occurs in three parts, each corresponding to an aspect of his eventual complete manhood. The first takes place in the court of his lame uncle. That many scholars have associated the lame king with Bendigeidfran of the Second Branch, as well as the Fisher King of French romance, strengthens both Ito's and Aronstein's suggestions: Bendigeidfran is both a clearly supernatural figure and also a native Welsh one.⁸⁵⁷ Here he is an old man well past martial exploits of his own, but his task is to teach his young nephew more than simply swordwork. While Peredur may have been accepted as a potential knight with a single victory and a suit of armour, his growth cannot be considered complete until he has also developed an understanding of 'moes a mynud', the etiquette and proper behaviour of a knight.⁸⁵⁸ The first thing the old man does to accomplish this is instruct Peredur to forget the parting words of his mother: 'Ymadaw weithon a ieth dy vam, a mi a uydaf athro it ac a'th urdaf yn varchawc urdawl.'⁸⁵⁹

All of this serves to locate Peredur in a particularly ambiguous position. With his uncle taking over his education he is removed from his mother's immediate influence, but here, in the house of his maternal uncle and in a landscape which appears to be an extension of her forest refuge, he can also not be said to occupy a wholly masculine space. Ito notes that both Peredur's uncles are attached to his maternal lineage, 'the male side of his female relation',⁸⁶⁰ but this in itself is not unusual; as shown in the chapter on *Culhwch*, the relationship between warrior men and their sororal nephews has long been significant.⁸⁶¹

If Peredur is here told to forget his mother's ethically questionable advice, the dilemma is that here it is not replaced with anything more useful. The uncle's new instruction, 'O hyn allan, llyna a wnelych; kyt gwelych a vo ryued genhyt, nac amofyn ymdanaw ony byt o wybot y venegi it,' causes just as much trouble as when he was earlier told to help himself to ladies and their jewels, and although Peredur is told it will be his teacher's fault and not his own if things go wrong because

857Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 246.

858Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 18.

859*ibid.* 'Forget now your mother's words – I will be your teacher and make you a knight.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 72.

860Ito, p. 143.

861See the previous chapter on *Culhwch ac Olwen* for discussion on the significance of the avunculate and Celtic and greater Indo-European cultures.

of it, in practice he is the one who bears the consequences and is required to right the eventual wrong.⁸⁶²

The actual purpose and significance of this instruction, and its consequences through the rest of the narrative, has caused scholars to expend a good deal of energy and ink all without any truly satisfying explanation. McMullen suggests that the prohibition on speech that dominates so much of the text, from his mother's refusal to speak of swords and saddles to Peredur's vow of silence until Angharad Law Eurog loves him, functions to remind the audience of its importance: 'to emphasize the need for the Welsh to communicate their culture – in effect, to teach the medieval reader or listening audience a lesson.'⁸⁶³ This is once again drawn from a perspective of the colonisation which surrounds *Peredur's* development, a reminder too familiar to modern-day campaigners for the Welsh language, that silence does in fact equal death. This is drawn from Lloyd-Morgan's observation that Peredur's quest involves 'gradually discovering his own family and family history, having to work this out alone, with only a few hints from relatives to help him.'⁸⁶⁴

Another episode, which occurs later in the text, may shed some light on the uncle's instructions. After Peredur has avenged the dwarves, returned to Arthur's court, and won the love of Angharad Law Eurog, he encounters the Du Trahawc, the Black Oppressor, a one-eyed giant who initially shows Peredur hospitality despite his fearsome reputation. During their feasting, a drunken Peredur enquires of his host, 'Ryfed yw genhyf kadarnet y dywedy ti dy vot. Pwy a diodes dy lygat?'⁸⁶⁵ This, it turns out, was not an acceptable question. The Du Trahawc tells Peredur that 'vn o'm kynedueu oed, pwy bynnac a ofynhei imi yr hyn yd wyt ti yn y ofyn, ny chaffei y eneit genhyf, nac yn rat nac ar werth.'⁸⁶⁶ Whether, as Aronstein suggests, the wilderness of *Peredur* represents a native Wales, or whether Goetinck is right and the landscape is an Otherworldly terrain, it is clear

862Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 18. 'From now on this is what you must do: if you see something that you think is strange, do not ask about it unless someone is courteous enough to explain it to you.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 72.

863McMullen, p. 36.

864Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 228.

865Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 44. 'I am surprised that you claim to be as strong as you do. Who put out your eye?' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 87.

866*ibid.* 'One of my rules is that whoever asks me that question will not escape with his life, neither as a gift nor for a price.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 87.

that the castles of the uncles and the home of the Du Trahawc are both part of the same milieu. Both are external to Arthur's court and seem to share some characteristic of wildness. Within such a social context, it may be politic to caution young relatives against asking questions that will offend their hosts. Ito notes that by the time Peredur reaches the Du Trahawc, he is a fully functional adult male *marchog*, capable of defending himself and his actions, while at the time of his uncle's instruction he has still 'a third of his strength yet to come'; he is not yet mature enough to face the consequences of his questions.⁸⁶⁷ The episode of the Du Trahawc opens up further plotlines and adventures which, as a *macwy*, he would not yet have been ready to undertake.

It may in fact be that the procession in the castle of the second uncle, accompanying as it did his martial masculine education, was the pivotal moment itself. A number of possibilities have been suggested for the significance of the bleeding spear and severed head in their mysterious procession in the second uncle's court.

Ar neill law y ewythyr yd eistedawd Peredur, ac ymdidan a orugant. Ar hynny, ef a welei deu was yn dyuot y'r neuad ac o'r neuad yn mynet yn ystauell, a gwayw ganthunt anuedrawl y veint, a their ffrwt ar y hyt yn redec o'r mwn hyt y llawr. A phan welas pawb y gweission yn dyuot yn y wed honno, llefein a drycyruerth a gymerth pawb yndunt, hyt nat oed hawd y neb y diodef. Ny thorres y gwr ar y ymdidan a Pheredur yr hynny. Ny dywawt y gwr y Peredur beth oed hynny, nys gofynnwys ynteu idaw.

Gwedy tewi ysbeit vechan, ar hynny, llyma dwy vorwyn yn dyuot y mywn a dyscyl vawr y rygthunt, a phen gwr ar y dyscyl, a gwaet yn amhyl yg kylch y pen. Ac yna diaspedein a llefein a oruc pawb, hynny oed anhawd y neb bot yn vn ty ac wynt. Yn y diwed peidaw a hynny a orugant, ac eisted tra uu amkan ganthunt ac yfet. Yn ol hynny ystauell a gyweirwyt y Peredur ac y gyscu yd aethant.⁸⁶⁸

This is clearly a test, though the text itself remains divided about its objective. Peredur has only just been instructed not to ask questions, and like his encounter with the maiden in the clearing, he is determinedly doing as he's told. Goetinck suggests the bleeding spear as representative of the lost sovereignty of Peredur's father, and certainly there are clear associations

⁸⁶⁷Ito, p. 149.

⁸⁶⁸Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 20. 'Suddenly he could see two lads entering the hall, and from the hall they proceeded to a chamber, carrying a spear of huge proportions, with three streams of blood running from its socket to its floor. When everyone saw the lads coming in this way, they all began weeping and wailing so that it was not easy for anyone to endure it. Yet the man did not interrupt his conversation with Peredur. The man did not explain to Peredur what that was, nor did Peredur ask him about it. After a short silence, suddenly two maidens entered with a large salver between them, and a man's head on the salver, and much blood around the head. And then they all shrieked and wailed so that it was not easy for anyone to stay in the same building. At last they stopped, and remained sitting as long as it pleased them, and drank. After that a chamber was prepared for Peredur, and they went to sleep.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 73.

with the *par* element of the eponymous hero's name.⁸⁶⁹ It is also a scene in which an adolescent boy (at two-thirds of the way to full manhood, he is likely around fourteen years old) just on the cusp of becoming a man witnesses a clearly phallic, sexually-charged image – a bloodied white spear dripping streams of virginal blood — and is forbidden from speaking of it aloud to the company.⁸⁷⁰ He has previously reacted to the presence of women in strict terms dictated by his mother; there has been no sign of genuine sexual interest on his part at all and the lady of the clearing even found him laughable. Even after this encounter he calls most of the maidens he meets 'chwaer' and takes up their causes without expectation of romantic reward – he says repeatedly, 'ny deuthum i yma i wreicca' – but from this point his dealings with them do take on a more personal quality. Certainly it is only after he leaves his uncle's court that he falls in love at all. That there is likely a wider significance to the procession of the head and spear to the others in the company need not preclude it being a personal and uncomfortable transition point and a marker of sexual awakening for Peredur himself.

If, following Ito's observations to their logical conclusion, the 'motif of the fatal question' is directly related to the hero's progress toward manhood, then Peredur, having not yet finished his training or come into his own, is not yet ready to ask the meaning of the procession – even if, as the longer version of the text says, his not doing so causes the ruin of his uncle's patrimony.⁸⁷¹ Meanwhile the social context shared with the *Du Trahawc*, in which asking awkward questions of one's hosts is not only socially unacceptable but downright dangerous, suggests that there is more at play here than simply one strange encounter with an eccentric relative. Leslie Ellen Jones suggests that etiquette may have dictated in some instances that a stranger not be asked his business until after he had been fed — possibly related to a custom of hospitality that obligated both host and guest to mutual nonviolence — and the ancient Celtic tendency, recorded by Roman writers, to

⁸⁶⁹Goetinck, *Peredur (b)*, p. 258.

⁸⁷⁰In *Perceval*, the hero is fifteen when he leaves his mother's abode. I have based my assessment of his age here on Charles-Edwards's analysis of the life cycle of Welsh and Irish men in the legal tracts.

⁸⁷¹Ito, p. 189.

decorate their homes, armour and surroundings with the severed heads of their enemies. These trophies, she explains, would be displayed to guests in the same way a modern host might make sure their own families' awards are visible to guests, who are then obligated by courtesy to enquire as to their acquisition. This explains the uncle's admonition to Peredur not to speak, at first, and not to ask questions — if this is the sort of thing that was considered rude before a set point in the meal, it was a thing he had yet to learn. Similarly, if in his youth he missed the cue for when speaking would become appropriate, which according to the Black Maiden he certainly did, then this too is an aspect of his incomplete education. Jones explains:

These elements taken together suggest a picture in which a stranger arrives at a Celtic household, is given a meal at which, at first, no one speaks, but after a time questions are asked and questions in return are expected; and part of the exchange of pleasantries may have included an exhibition of the host's collection of heads. We can guess that if the guest did not inquire, the host did not have the opportunity to boast, which could have been an unpleasant breach of etiquette.⁸⁷²

Certainly boasting about one's victories in battle was an honoured tradition amongst the Celts, referenced by both Irish and classical authors. Diodorus and the text of *Bricriu's Feast* both show the assembled warriors boasting over their meals. It is easy to imagine a scenario in which strangers reached a host's house, were given food in a pledge of hospitality before any of the questioning begins, and then, when all those present begin to boast of the warriors they've killed, there is some safety for those who might offend another guest, or even their host, by having been the cause of death for a friend or relative. Walter Map reports that the Welsh refrain from questioning guests for three days, lest they be considered miserly.⁸⁷³ Strabo relates that Posidonius, whose writings on the Celts do not survive in their original form but are often quoted, claimed the owners of the heads would boast of how they or their ancestors acquired it, how much money they had been offered for it, and how they had rejected all offers in favour of hanging on to such an important family heirloom:

⁸⁷²Jones, Leslie Ellen. 'Heads or grails?: A reassessment of the Celtic origin of the grail legend.' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 14. (Cambridge, MA 1994) 24-38 p. 28-9.

⁸⁷³Map, Walter. *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, Rev. C.N.L. Brook and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1983), p. 182.

The Celts have another barbaric outlandish custom...of returning from battle with the heads of their enemies hanging from their horses' necks, and nailing them to the porches of their houses. At all events, Posidonius says that he saw this sight himself often, and at first was nauseated, but afterwards took it lightly through familiarity. They would embalm with cedar oil the heads of their distinguished enemies and display them to guests, and would not consider ransoming them for even their weight in gold.⁸⁷⁴

Anne Ross suggested a 'cult of the head' in ancient Celtic tribes, also associated with horned gods, based primarily on an optimistic interpretation of Strabo and his contemporaries, archaeological evidence, and medieval literature.⁸⁷⁵ The problem with this conclusion should be evident: not that there was necessarily no veneration of heads amongst certain tribes of ancient Celts, but that it runs up against the usual impossibility of tracing the lineage of a motif through centuries, or millennia, of empty space. Nor is the practice of heads as a symbol of defeated enemies a uniquely Celtic or even ancient phenomenon; from the Scythians and Thracians and the native tribes of north America to nineteenth-century India and the flags of Corsica and Sardinia, warrior societies have used them as symbolic markers.⁸⁷⁶ The fetishisation of severed heads cannot be used to evidence an exclusively Celtic practise, especially into the medieval period; however such exclusivity may not be necessary. That some local tradition involving heads – at the very least, the perception of such a tradition on the part of native redactors and possibly continental authors as well – seems reasonable in light of their recurrence in literature: the buried head of Bendigeidfran in the Second Branch, for instance, which protects Britain, while the head on the plate in *Peredur* seems to hold some significance even if both audience and characters seem unclear on precisely what that significance is. While many instances of decapitation can be considered purely practical, it is unlikely that a ceremonial head presented on a salver during a procession carries no symbolic or metaphorical meaning. Especially as the cognate scenes of in Chrétien forms the basis for the entire Grail legend which dominated Arthurian literature through much of the middle ages, the eucharistic implications

874Kidd, I.G. *Posidonius*, III, *The Translation of the Fragments* (Cambridge 1999) 346-7, F274 (Strabo 4.4.5). For further discussion on the head-hunting customs of the Celts see Sims-Williams, 'Celtic civilization: continuity or coincidence?' *CMCS* 64, p. 1-45.

875Ross, Anne. *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, revised edition. (London 1992), p. 94.

876Sims-Williams, Patrick. 'Celtic civilization: continuity or coincidence?' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 64 (2012), 1-45, p. 4. See also Haines, M. and Steckel, R. *A Population History of North America* (Cambridge 2000), p. 68 and Ann Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, *passim*.

of presenting flesh are difficult to escape.

The Testing Phase

As soon as Peredur departs his second uncle's court, a series of similar encounters within the feminine landscape serve to demonstrate both his own growth, and his apparently unique position as an agent of his own fate. No sooner has he left the court than the vulnerability of his maternal realm and the effects of his own actions upon it presents itself again. He encounters a strange woman who introduces herself as his foster-sister, and tells him that his mother is dead as a result of his departure. The sister's husband has just been killed by another of the local aggressive enemy-knights, and Peredur, while agreeing to avenge her, also blames her presence for his own potential downfall:

'Kam, vy chwaer,' heb ef, 'yd wyt y'm kerydu. Ac am vy mot y gyt a chwi yn gyhyt ac y bum, abreid vyd im y oruot, a pheí bydwn a uei hwy, nys goruydwn byth....A mi a gladaf y gwr ac a af gyt a thi yn y mae y marchawc, ac o gallaf ymdiala, mi a'e gwnaf.'⁸⁷⁷

Certainly this draws attention to Peredur's unique position within this passive and uncontrolled landscape. In this he is not alone – Owain, as well, is the hero of a tale in which only the visiting knight can apparently accomplish anything, the only one who can traverse the boundaries between the otherworld and Arthur's *llys*. The inhabitants of these lands, which almost seem to exist purely for the education and development of young knights, are locked in a permanent state of threat without any hope of resolution, despite their assurances to Peredur that each time he has arrived barely in time to prevent their ultimate downfall.

Peredur's accusation that his foster-sister's presence is damaging to his own martial prowess appears to be connected to this impotence. It seems unlikely that it is only being so close to a woman that would cause him to lose to the knight, even in a text that navigates a delicate line between the courtly and heroic. Even if he is not building a chivalric identity based on performing

⁸⁷⁷Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 21. "You are wrong, sister," he said, "to blame me. And because I have stayed with you as long as I have, I will scarcely defeat the knight; and were I to stay longer I would never overcome him....And I will bury the man, and go with you to where the knight is, and if I can get revenge I will do so." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 74.

for noble ladies, still Peredur's developing masculinity is, as noted above, in the hands of women and old men who are not presently warriors themselves. Rather, he seems to fear that too intimate an association with the powerless inhabitants of this world will drain his own capacity for martial aggression. If the foster-sister herself is part of this world, as the text suggests she is, then who is her husband? Was he, like Peredur, a wandering *macwy* on the way to becoming a *marchog* and simply failed, or was he one of its regular residents, unable to maintain agency over his own fate? He has failed, in any case, in the basic obligation of protecting a woman who is attached to him, leaving her to seek the aid of her other male kin. This is why, upon defeating the knight, Peredur compels him to 'gymryt y wreic hon yn briawt' (take this woman as a wife'), transferring the responsibility for his foster-sister to another male aggressor.⁸⁷⁸ He also, however, sends them back to Arthur's court, where the knight can cause no more trouble – effectively removing him from the gameboard.

Peredur explicitly claims to be acting as an agent of Arthur in this encounter, but his actions betray his words. His message, 'menegi idaw nat af y lys hyny ymgaffwyf a'r gwr hir yssyd yno, y dial sarhaet y corr a'r vorwyn', is clearly choosing the maternal otherworld realm over the court of Arthur – to the detriment of that court, which is to be deprived of his presence and prowess.⁸⁷⁹ There is an obvious element of reminding the court what it lacks which is emphasised by Arthur's conversation with Owain and resulting decision to go out searching for Peredur.

Meanwhile, Peredur is having his first real adult encounter. He is greeted at the door as a warrior, called 'unben', and his presence is a clear source of hope for the beleaguered residents. This court, like the others in this landscape, is populated by maidens and *macwy*, and under attack by an aggressive, adult masculine force.

The first sign that Peredur has matured is his answer to the youth who greets him at the door:

⁸⁷⁸Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 22. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 74.

⁸⁷⁹Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 22. 'I tell him that I will not set foot in his court until I confront the tall man who is there, to avenge the insult to the dwarf and the maiden.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 74.

'Dewis, vnben,' heb ef [y was], 'ae mi a agorwyf y porth itti, ae menegi y'r neb penhaf dy vot titheu yn y porth.'
'Manac vy mot yma, ac o mynnir vyn dyuot y mwyn, mi a doaf.'⁸⁸⁰

This demonstrates a marked improvement in Peredur's understanding of courtesy – at last he has learned to wait for an invitation, and his behaviour is becoming more in line with the social customs of a civilised court. His external appearance – the horse, armour, and accoutrements of a travelling knight – have alerted the inhabitants of the fortress that he is likely a force to be reckoned with, and if he can be persuaded to their cause, may prove instrumental in defeating their attackers.

This leads to an encounter between the maiden countess, her foster-brothers, and Peredur which exemplifies both romantic conceit and the perpetual dilemma of this landscape. The hero's first look at her can be compared to both Geraint's introduction to Enid and Owain's first glimpse of his *iarlles*, as well as Olwen's first appearance in *Culhwch* and various other Arthurian and romantic descriptions from other traditions. He is struck by her beauty, which is then described in conventional terms, and they negotiate the price of his protection.

...a'r vorwyn penhaf onadunt, diheu oed ganthaw na welsei dremynt kymryt eirioed a hi ar arall. Henwisc o bali twll ymdanei a uuassei da. Yn y gwelit a chnawt trwyddaw, gwynach oed no blawt y crissant gwynhaf; a gwallt hitheu a'e dwyael, duach oedynt no'r dim cochaf.⁸⁸¹

The narrative voice of the *rhamantau* is generally external and impersonal, delving only occasionally into the viewpoint of any particular character. This is in contrast, certainly, with the French verse romances, in which characters spend long spans of lines on soliloquies detailing their own thoughts and emotional state, but is a regular feature of *cyfarwydd* storytelling.⁸⁸² That we have stepped into Peredur's perspective here, even for a moment, is not insignificant. The ladies of the first part of the text are always beautiful, as the ladies of romance are always bound to be, but described briefly as 'wineu telediw' (beautiful, auburn-haired). The maiden's appearance is told in

880 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 23. "“Take your choice, lord,” he [the youth] said; “either I shall open the gate for you, or I shall tell the man in charge that you are in the gateway.” “Say that I am here, and if he wants me to enter I will.” Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 75.

881 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 23. 'As for the principle maiden amongst them, he was sure that he had never seen such a beautiful sight. She wore an old dress of tattered brocaded silk that had once been good; where her flesh could be seen through it, it was whiter than the flowers of the whitest crystal; her hair and her eyebrows were blacker than jet; two tiny red spots in her cheeks, redder than the reddest thing.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 75.

882 Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd*, pp. 198-99.

quite formulaic terms, and the narrative itself interrupted to make room for it; we are temporarily distracted from the dilapidated state of the fortress and the obvious distress of its inhabitants to fully assess a woman's beauty.

The gown she wears, like the worn clothes of Enid's family in *Geraint*, speaks to her status as a noblewoman, a *bonheddig*, who has fallen on hard times without a male protector to safeguard her interests. Her gown is '[p]ali' – an expensive brocaded silk – but also 'twll' (full of holes, or indeed, wounded) – the gown is the material symbol of her position as much as Peredur's armour is of his, and its worn state reflects her compromised position.⁸⁸³ But the dress itself is not where Peredur's adolescent eyes fall. Rather, his gaze lingers where he can see the white flesh through the holes in her clothing. Along with the audience, he spends time gazing at her, and it is the first time in the text, although not the last, in which the young hero experiences any sort of sexual attraction to one of the ladies he encounters. This, of course, is another sign of his growth and progress to this point in the narrative, as erotic heterosexual desire is a necessary component of the adult warrior masculinity to which Peredur aspires. Burns notes of romance heroines that 'much is made...of the white skin...[which] itself constitutes the aristocratic woman's typical garment', and that a partial *déshabillé* is a regular feature of ladies in romance.⁸⁸⁴

The maiden's appearance itself – and indeed the physical characteristics of the many of the women who populate this landscape – is significant more for its small deviation from accepted idealised norms than for adherence to it. Uncommonly – almost uniquely – none of these women are blonde. That they are for the most part red-haired may indicate an Otherworldly aspect to the world, as red hair has long been associated with magic, witchcraft, and danger.⁸⁸⁵ The maiden

883 GPC, 'twll'. This text is one of the geiriadur's textual attestations for 'twll' as 'full of holes, holed, pierced, wounded'.

884 Burns, E. Jane, 'Refashioning courtly love: Lancelot as lady's man or ladyman?' *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie et al (Minneapolis 1997) 111-134, p. 120.

885 Furthermore, red is an attested colour of the Celtic otherworld, at least as far as the Hounds of Annwn, with their red tips on otherwise white animals. The medieval discomfort with red hair is well-attested. The twelfth-century Proverbs of Alfred warns against trusting redheads (Morris, Richard, ed *An Old English miscellany containing a bestiary, Kentish sermons, Proverbs of Alfred, religious poems of the thirteenth century*, (London: EETS 1872) p. 138) while the Secretum Secretorum, which was highly influential in twelfth-century Europe, cautions against choosing ginger advisors because 'red hair is a sign of stupidity and love of power'. (Bacon, Roger. *Opera Hactenus Inedita*. 1920. Reprint. London: Forgotten Books, 2013) 220-1. St Jerome equated red hair with 'the fires of Gehenna' (W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol.

herself has black hair, which will be important for scene in which Peredur considers her resemblance to a raven, but absolutely opposes the normal accepted appearance of a romantic hero's love-interest, a figure who, throughout most of medieval European literature, was required to adhere to a particular aesthetic ideal.⁸⁸⁶ This convention is used in Welsh, as we have seen already, to describe Olwen in *Culhwch*, and is familiar enough to be subverted by the appearance of the Black Maiden in the final section of *Peredur*, showing it was certainly as familiar to Welsh audiences as any other. At the same time, Hemming has found evidence 'that the Welsh literary environment was more flexible than the French where the colours of human body were concerned'.⁸⁸⁷ The significance of this particular combination, reminiscent of folklore heroines like Snow White, will shortly become clear.

The structure of this encounter is not uncommon within romance and is similar to episodes in *Owein*; in fact the connections between them are well worth noting. The young woman, heiress to her late father's estate, is, like the many beleaguered countesses populating medieval texts, in the position of needing a male protector to advance and safeguard her interests. The neighbouring earl, she tells Peredur, tried first to gain control of her lands by marriage, but when she refused him, has resorted to conquest instead. Like both the *iarlles* and the other countess who enlists the wandering Owain's help, the maiden embodies a female space vulnerable to penetration and conquest by aggressive male neighbours and which, while it may hold out under siege for a while, cannot permanently safeguard its own security. That the invasion can be seen to represent a sexual conquest as well as an economic one is clear as the two are integrally linked; with possession of the woman comes possession of her property, just as the takeover of her fortress also allows the

6. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001107.htm>>) and of course the *Malleus Maleficarum* claims that red hair and green eyes are the marks of a witch. Other significant figures of dubious morality depicted in the middle ages as redheads include Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Mary Magdalene, Judas Iscariot, Cain, Lilith, and Lucifer, regardless of whether this was historically likely.

886 Colby, Alice. *The Portrait in Twelfth Century French Literature : an example of the stylistic originality of Chrétien de Troyes* (Geneva, 1965) p. 30 *et passim* and Duggan, Joseph, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven, CT, 2001) p. 262. See also Brewer, 'Ideal of Feminine Beauty', p. 258.

887 Hemming, Jessica. 'I could love a man with these three colours: Gazing and the tricolour beloved', *CMCS* 68 (2014): 51-68, p. 61.

takeover of her body. As Susan Murray has noted, 'the castle can be said to be a metaphor for the feminine with all the mysterious enclosed spaces'.⁸⁸⁸ Furthermore, the fortress's ability to withstand a siege, dependent on the assistance of the neighbouring religious women, can similarly be read metaphorically: a firm hold on virtue may enable a woman to resist aggressive advances for a time, but like a castle, will eventually fall without outside aid.⁸⁸⁹ Henri Lefebvre raises questions about the relationships represented by space and its delineations of power structure, leading Megan Leitch to observe of medieval romance that 'it is not only bodies, but spaces such as bowers, that are the battlefields of competing jurisdictions'.⁸⁹⁰ It is in the bedchamber that the girl confesses her dilemma to Peredur, having already allowed him entrance to the private spaces of her castle. However, she is really only trading one unwilling liaison for another – her own agency is compromised this time not by an attack, but by the threat of her foster-brothers to abandon her:

'Mynet at y maccwy y'r ystafell yghot, y ymgynnic idaw yn y wed y bo da ganthaw, ae yn wreic idaw, ae yn orderch.'

'Llyna,' heb hi, 'beth ny wedha. Miui heb achaws ym eiroed a gwr, ac ymgynnic ohoaf inheu indaw ef ymlaen vyg gorderchu i ohonaw ef. Ny allaf i yr dim.'

'Dygwn y Duw an kyffes,' heb wynt, 'ony wney ti hynny, ni a'th adawn ti y'th elynyon yma.'

Ar hynny kyfodi a wnaeth y vorwyn y vynydd y dan ellwg y dagreu, a dyfot racdi y r ystauell.⁸⁹¹

The maiden's choice, here, is not whether or not to surrender her body and property at all, but which man should be able to claim it. Her father may never have given her to anyone against her will, but her remaining male kin are not so considerate of her own feelings. Her limited options

888 Murray, Susan E. 'Women and castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory', *Arthuriana* 13:1 (2003) 17-41, p. 18.

889 The idea of the castle as a metaphor for a personal or spiritual stronghold was understood by medieval writers. For an example see Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Sermo SVII: In Assumptione beatae Mariae', *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris 1844-64) 195, cols. 303-4. Also Abigail Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England* (Woodbridge 2004) pp. 78-111; Charles Coulson, 'Structural symbolism in medieval castle architecture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 132 (1979) 73-90, and David Cowling, *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon 1998). Of particular relevance to Arthurian literature is the obvious example of Uther Pendragon's siege on Tintagel to obtain Ygraine. Roberta Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle: A Study in the Medieval Allegory of the Edifice with Especial Reference to Religious Writings* (Unpublished PhD, Bryn Mawr 1930), discusses the body of the Virgin Mary as a castle with Christ's birth leaving it intact.

890 Leitch, Megan, 'Entering the bedroom: Managing space for the erotic in middle English romance', *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, A. Hopkins, R.A. Rouse and C.J. Rushton, eds. (Woodbridge 2014) 39-54, p. 41. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford 1991) pp. 27 and 83.

891 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 24. "Go to the squire in the chamber nearby, and offer yourself to him however he wants, either as his wife or as his mistress." "That," she said, "is something which is not proper – I, who have never been with a man, offering myself to him before he courts me. I cannot do that on any account." "By our confession to God," they said, "unless you do that, we will leave you here to your enemies." With that the maiden got up in tears, and went straight to the chamber.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 75-76.

do not include a man she might actually love (although she seems to reach that point with Peredur) but rather, between one who will take what he wants by force or one who will agree to fight her battles, and who is able to protect her interests from aggressive neighbours. By this standard, Peredur is the preferable choice not only by his manners, but by his ability to defeat a masculine warrior with full armour, weaponry and retinue rather than seeking victory only over a stranded woman and her young male relatives.

The previous section on *Geraint* noted that the hero's marriage to Enid was based on *bonheddig* status rather than monetary concerns, as daughters in medieval Wales were ineligible to inherit land or titles. This, R. R. Davies notes, 'may explain why Welsh medieval history, though it has an occasional Amazonian heroine, has none of those heiresses whose fortunes and fate are such a prominent feature of the territorial policies of medieval England.'⁸⁹² Within literature, however, heiresses do exist, as do women rulers in their own right. This disconnect between political reality and narrative necessity might not necessitate comment at all, allowing for fiction to not completely reflect real life, were not other aspects of *Peredur* clearly concerned with the peculiarities of medieval Welsh law, such as the scene with Gwenhwyfar and the cup. The dilemma has been dealt with in various ways by scholars, some of whom have claimed it emphasises the element of sovereignty in Celtic literature while others suggest it represents the encroachment of English law and culture into native Welsh society.⁸⁹³ There is merit in both these arguments, and furthermore it is possible, even likely, that both are true in combination. However, that female characters with this function exist within the continental-influenced *rhamantau* but not to any great extent in the native tales such as *Culhwch* or the Four Branches does suggest an external origin. Certainly by the late middle ages, the ability of women to inherit was already murky water, particularly in the Marches and in areas where English law applied to at least some, if not all, of the residents. Ever practical

892 Davies, R.R. 'The status of women and the practice of marriage in late-medieval Wales', *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff 1980) 93-114, p. 101.

893 See Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', Lovecy, 'Celtic sovereignty theme', Goetinck, *Peredur(b)*, Doan, James E. 'Sovereignty aspects in the roles of women in medieval Irish and Welsh society,' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* (1985) 87-102, Kristen Lee Over, *Kingship, Conquest and Patria* (New York and London 2005).

Welsh fathers would establish English status for their daughters in order to be able to pass on land to them, even if they rejected English culture in every other way; likewise the marcher lords would insist on upholding Welsh law if it advantaged them.⁸⁹⁴ R. R. Davies has shown that 'Wales by the end of the twelfth century, was a land of two peoples,' that being the hybrid Welsh and Anglo-Norman March and the *Pura Wallia* of the native princes.⁸⁹⁵ Thus we see that the borders of Wales themselves are a liminal zone in very real terms, and the land which the young Peredur leaves his maternal realm to explore can, in fact, reflect the social topography of medieval Wales. The extent to which it does this, however – or even tries to – is unclear, and placing the hero's adventures in a real, recognisable place is unnecessary within romance. As Owen has noted, only Arthur's court at Caerleon is given a specific location in *Peredur*, and that 'o'i gymharu â byd y Gogynfeirdd, byd harddwch, byd lle y rhoddid y pwyslais pennaf ar "foes a mynud" ac awyrgylch benywol, yw byd llys y rhamantau.'⁸⁹⁶ This 'awyrgylch benywol', like Ito's suggestion of the maternal realm, is significant because it occurs in all cases: whether the land of Peredur's explorations is primarily a supernatural Otherworld, a reflection of his mother's hideaway, or a fictionalised version of the either *Pura Wallia* or the real medieval March, it is expressed as overwhelmingly female, Othered, and exotic. Yet at the same time, it is a land where Peredur is clearly at home. He may still be learning its customs, but he is less a foreigner in it than he is in Arthur's court. James Wade, in a study of fairyland in medieval literature, has suggested that supernatural realms open 'adoxic' (as opposed to orthodox or heterodox) spaces which can be used to neutralise social and moral concerns that would be inescapable in the real world, which 'allowed for the exemption...not only from any social or moral structures established in the human worlds of their texts, but also from those worlds' logical and physical laws'.⁸⁹⁷ However, the supernatural landscape of *Peredur* is

894 *ibid.* pp. 100-104. See also Davies, R.R., *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales: 1282-1400* (Oxford 1978) pp. 306-318.

895 Davies, R.R. *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford and Cardiff 1987) p. 100.

896 Owen, Morfydd E. "'Arbennic milwyr a blodeu marchogion": Cymdeithas *Peredur*', *Canhwyll Marchogion: Cyddestunoli Peredur*, Sioned Davies and Peter Wynn Thomas, eds. (Cardiff 2000) 91-112, p. 91. 'In contrast to the world of the Gogynfeirdd, a beautiful world, a world where the main emphasis is on the manners and customs of the court, and a female atmosphere, is the world of the court of the romance.' Trans. mine.

897 Wade, James. *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York 2011) p. 15.

intimately concerned with social and moral structures relative to the 'real' world of Arthur's *llys*, even if its logical and physical laws are sometimes negotiable.

Another example of this negotiable relationship with *realpolitik* occur after Peredur has fought and defeated the earl and his retinue. He effectively transforms the maiden's social gender, by arranging 'teyrnet a darystygedigaeth' (tribute and submission) to her from the defeated earl, laying claim to his goods on her behalf, and declaring to him 'a thitheu yn y medyant [y vorwyn]'.⁸⁹⁸ Again, in reality, there was no mechanism in Wales by which an earl would be brought under the authority of an unmarried female ruler. Within the text, however, Peredur's own authority is sufficient to construct a new, hybrid position consisting of female appropriation of lordship. The material trappings of tribute are reminiscent of the spoils a victor might require of a defeated opponent: food, drink, horses and weapons for three hundred men – in effect, he is to provide her with the maintenance of her own war-band. That this transformation, however, is predicated on Peredur's own masculine accomplishment is emphasised in an exchange with the maiden later, where before leaving he promises her, "...o daw na gofit arnat nac enbytrwyd, manac attaf i a mi a'th amdiffynaf os gallaf". Her continued authority is dependent not on her own actions, which are curtailed by her own femininity, but by reliance on his martial prowess. The defence of her position is an ongoing affair; having once achieved it – or at least, having it achieved for her – she remains under threat.

Peredur takes his leave – another marked difference from the French *Perceval*, in which the young hero marries Blanchefleur, the corresponding character. Here he cannot stop moving, for his growth and training are not yet complete. The final step in his development into adult masculinity occurs at the hands of the Witches of Caerloyw.⁸⁹⁹ In contrast to the 'boys in boxes' discussed in the chapter on *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the growing hero of the *rhamantau* cannot reach his full adult

898 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 27 "“And if you are ever in distress or danger, let me know, and I will defend you if I can.””
Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 78.

899 The 'gwidonot kaer loyw' may be part of a wider tradition; the poem *Pa Wr* says that Ceï 'a guant nav guiton' (pierced nine witches) and Caerloyw (Gloucester) is where Mabon is held captive in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

potential without the influence of women. This is not an exclusively continental phenomenon that has migrated into Welsh with the romance, as the ability of women's speech and foreknowledge to shape the hero is also found in Irish.⁹⁰⁰ The supernatural sword-trainer, while not often found in surviving Welsh texts, is attested in the *Tochmarc Emire*, where Cú Chulainn is trained by the warrior woman Scáthach.⁹⁰¹ Cú Chulainn's situation is comparable, although he is more aware of both himself and his surroundings than Peredur:

After three days the girl told Cúchulainn, if he really wanted to learn heroic deeds, he must go to where Scáthach was teaching her two sons...and give his hero's salmon-leap up to the big yew-tree where she was resting, then put his sword between her breasts and make her promise three things: thoroughness in his training, a dowry for his marriage, and tidings of his future – for Scáthach was also a prophetess.⁹⁰²

In *Peredur*, the trainer figures are also magical women whom the hero first encounters by violent means:

Peredur a gyrchwys y widon ac a'e trewis a chledyf ar y pen yny ledawd y helym a'e ffenffestin mal dyscyl ar y phen.
'Dy nawd, Peredur dec vab Efracw, a nawd Duw.'
'Paham y gwdosti, wrach, mae Peredur wyf i?'
'Tygheteun a gweledigaeth yw im godef douut y genhyt, ac y titheu kymryt march ac arueu y genhyt inheu. Ac y gyt a ami y gydy yspeit yn dyscu itt varchogaeth dy varch a theimlaw dy arueu.'⁹⁰³

Peredur actually inflicts violence, rather than simply threatening it – the witch's helm spreads like a dish on her head – but the actual damage is superficial and the witch herself appears unbothered. There is a certain disconnect in her behaviour in any case; where Scáthach is a warrior queen whose court follows a *moes a mynudd* of its own, the Caerloyw witches are savage and uncivilised even in this landscape; when Peredur first sees her, 'oed widon yn ymordiwes a'r gwylwr, ac ynteu yn diaspedein'.⁹⁰⁴ This inelegant battle, in which the 'gwrrach' holds onto a screaming watchman while the young protagonist beats her about the head with his sword, is reminiscent of Arthur's battle with

900 Findon, Joanne. *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle* (Toronto 1997) p. 52.

901 Kinsella, Thomas. *The Tain* (Oxford 1969) pp. 30-31.

902 Kinsella, p. 30.

903 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 29-30. 'Peredur attacked the witch and struck her on the head with a sword under her helmet and mail cap spread out like a dish on her head. "Your mercy, fair Peredur son of Efrog, and the mercy of God." "How did you know, witch, that I am Peredur?" "It was fated and foretold that I would suffer grief at your hands, and that you would receive a horse and weapons from me. And you will stay with me for a while as I teach you how to ride your horse and handle your weapons."' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 79.

904 *ibid.* p. 29. '...a witch was grabbing hold of the watchman, and he was screaming.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 78-9.

the Black Witch in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In Welsh texts, even more than in Irish ones, battles with women are not pretty.

A significant aspect we have also seen in Welsh texts is the power of a maternal figure to regulate the identity of a male child: this is recurrent in native texts, particularly *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*. Peredur's mother, who is now dead, failed in her duty to transmit the necessary codes and behaviours to her son. Like Aranrhod in the Fourth Branch, she chose to deny him his martial birthright and just as ineffectively – that it was done out of protectiveness rather than malice makes it no less a failed responsibility. The Witches, as part of the maternal Otherworld realm through which Peredur travels, serve as an extension of his mother and a remedy for her negligence.

The episode which follows, in which Peredur ceases completely to act and instead appears to become paralysed by romantic musings, can be seen to have a number of parallels and functions. It begins when Peredur, after taking his leave of the witches, spends the night with a hermit and then ventures out to pick up his quest again.

...a phan daw allan yd oed kawat o eira gwedy ryodi y nos gynt, a gwalch wyllt gwedy rylad hwyat yn tal y kudygyl. A chan twrwf y march, kyfodi y walch a disgynnu bran ar y kic yr ederyn. Sef a oruc Peredur, sefyll a chyffelybu duhet y vran a gwynder yr eira a chochter y gwaet, y wallt y wreic uwyhaf a garei, a oed kyn duhet a'r muchyd, a'e chnawt y wynder yr eira, a chochter y gwaet yn yr eira gwyn y'r deu van gochyon yg grudyau y wreic uwyhaf a garei.⁹⁰⁵

It has been noted over and over again by scholars that this scene is easily comparable with one from Irish literature, in *The Exile of the Sons of Uisnech*:⁹⁰⁶

Her foster-father flayed in the snow, on a day in winter, a hobbled, milk-fed calf for roasting. She watched it with Leborchom and saw a raven alight. Black-winged, the bird drank up splashed blood could desire a man with these three colours: raven-black hair, the colour of blood on his cheeks and a snow-bright body.⁹⁰⁷

905Goetinck, *Peredur*, pp. 30-1. 'Early the next morning he got up, and when he came outside a fall of snow had come down the night before. And a wild hawk had killed a duck near the cell. And what with the noise of the horse, the hawk rose and a raven descended on the bird's flesh. Peredur stood and compared the blackness of the raven and the whiteness of the snow and the redness of the blood to the hair of the woman he loved best, which was as black as jet, and her skin to the whiteness of the snow, and the redness of the blood in the white snow to the two red spots in the cheeks of the woman he loved best.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 122.

906Zimmer, Heinrich. *Keltische Studien: Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch von K. Windisch*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1881-1884) vol. ii p. 200, Goetinck, *Peredur(b)*, p. 234, Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 247.

907Kinsella, Thomas. *The Sons of Uisnech* (Dublin 1960), p. 6.

It is impossible to escape the comparison, especially as both scenes include elements of death and blood. Whether or not the Welsh storyteller took his inspiration from the Irish text is not entirely clear, however, for the trichromatic motif of red, black and white appears throughout the world in extremely disparate cultures.

It is the element of the feeding birds that leads Goetinck to draw a parallel between *Peredur* and the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, particularly a scene in which Gwydion finds a mortally wounded Lleu transformed into an eagle. Her suggestion is based on structural similarities: the hero being sought by a male figure (Gwalchmai and Gwydion) who has been given permission by their mutual lord (Arthur and Math) to conduct the search, and after a night in a humble dwelling the seeker discovers a bloody scene involving a bird. Gwydion then clothes Lleu after restoring him to human form, while Peredur changes into clothes like Gwalchmai's, effecting a kind of transformation into a member of the social group. These similarities appear superficial, however, especially in light of the differences in the context of the stories themselves. Birds feeding on carrion is a common enough motif in literature that deals with warriors, and while clothes, and changing them, certainly holds a symbolic function, Peredur has undergone an ongoing adaptation of his external form. Furthermore, the emphasis in *Peredur* on the black, white, and red colour scheme is absent in *Math*, although this may be stylistic, as the Four Branches do not, as a rule, describe characters' appearances.

The significance of the colour scheme lies in its possible connection to episodes in Irish literature: Deirdriu in *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and Findabair in *Táin Bó Fraich*, both of whom are inspired to love by the placement of red, white and black. Deirdriu's scene in particular also uses the theme of blood, raven and snow to display the colours, providing the closest parallel to the situation in *Peredur* – closer, even, than that of *Perceval* – while *Táin Bó Fraich* employs the colour motif without the bloodier elements:

Findabair said afterwards that, whatever beautiful thing she saw, she thought it more beautiful to look at Fróech across the dark water, his body very white, his hair very beautiful, his face very

shapely, his eyes very blue...the branch with the red berries between his throat and his white face.⁹⁰⁸

The relationship of both these examples to *Peredur* is, of course, unclear. The combination of black, white, and red appears to be genuinely universal, from *Song of Solomon* to *Snow White*, found throughout the world in folklore.⁹⁰⁹ It is possible therefore, but not necessary, that the redactor of *Peredur* was familiar, at least, with Deirdriu's story.⁹¹⁰ What is of particular relevance for our purposes here are Hemming's observations that the episodes of Deirdriu and Findabair constitute an active female gaze, and that when this same act is transferred to a male character, the active gaze becomes not only passive, but paralysing: Peredur, and his counterparts Perceval, 'lapse into an immobile, trance-like state' which renders them unable to act.⁹¹¹ Whereas the sight of the love-inspiring colour scheme causes Deirdriu and Findabair to 'leap into quite unfeminine – and transgressive – action', either searching out or physically saving their respective beloved, the men are 'stunned into inaction', rousing themselves only when faced with an immediate physical threat and then lapsing again into lovesick catatonia.⁹¹² She suggests that this may be 'connected to the mesmerizing effect of "courtly love"...itself a kind of heightened male gazing that both objectifies the lady to the point of complete abstraction and ultimately immobilizes the male subject because he is in effect staring at a projection of his own inner being'.⁹¹³ Ferrante has also noted the singular narcissism of the courtly lover and the female beloved as a mirror by which the lover contemplates himself.⁹¹⁴ If the female is defined by passivity and the male by action, then the inspiration of the red, black and white beloved appears to provoke transgression of gender norms.

This episode, with its roots in intercultural folklore, is an example of narrative subverting

908Gantz, Jeffrey. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Harmondsworth 1981) p. 120. Hemming adapts the translation to emphasise particular colour elements: 'dazzling-white' for Fróech's body, 'blue-greenness' for his eyes, and 'black' rather than 'dark' for the water. 'I could love a man', p. 58.

909Vaz Da Silva, Francesco, 'Red as blood, white as snow, black as crow: Chromatic symbolism of womanhood in fairy tales', *Marvels and Tales* 21 (2007) 240-52.

910Sims-Williams, Patrick. *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford 2011) pp. 313-23.

911Hemming, 'I could love a man', p. 58.

912Hemming, 'I could love a man', p. 62. It is worth mentioning that while Hemming considers *Peredur* and *Perceval* as separate examples, I would suggest it is only one, and not indicative of a pattern. The two texts are so similar in this episode that it is clear they are related, regardless of transmission.

913*ibid.*

914Ferrante, Joan M., *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York 1975) pp. 78-79.

the 'horizon of expectation' of its audience. Men, especially warrior men, are supposed to be active, especially when away from the domesticating influence of the court; there is no reason for our young hero, who has overthrown enemy after enemy, to be so frozen, staring into space in the snow. That is he caught by lovesickness both signals his development in the compulsory heterosexuality of chivalric knighthood and undermines that very development.

While Peredur is hypnotised by the bloody tableau on the snow reminding him of his nameless lover, various members of his homosocial peer group – Arthur's court – are trying to get his attention. Arthur, travelling with his retinue, sends a number of his own men to enquire after the identity of a strange knight, with results that will be recognisable from similar episodes in *Geraint* and especially *Owein*:

Yna y doeth y mackwy yn yd oed Peredur a gofyn idaw beth a wnaei yno a phwy oed. A rac meint medwl Peredur ar y wreic uwyhaf a garei, ny rodes ateb idaw. Sef a wnaeth ynteu, gossot a gwayw ar Peredur, ac ynteu Peredur a ymchoeles ar y maccwy, [ac a'e gwant] tros pedrein y varch y'r llawr. Ac ol yn ol ef a doeth petwar machaw[c] ar hugeint, ac nyd attebei ef y'r vn mwy no[e] gylid, namyn yr vn gware a phob vn, y wan ar vn gossot tros [pedrein] y varch y'r llawr. Ynteu Gei a doeth attaw ef ac a dywawt yn disgethrin anhygar wrth Peredur. A Pheredur a'e kymmerth a gwayw dan y dwyen ac a'e byrywys ergyt mawr y wrthaw, hyny torres y vreich a gwahell y yscwyd.⁹¹⁵

Nameless knight episodes are a staple of much medieval fiction, occurring in both courtly and heroic examples. Owein (and his French counterpart Yvain) must challenge his former friends in his capacity as the black knight of the fountain. Bertilak of *Gawain* hides his identity as the Green Knight until the last possible moment. Cú Chulainn kills his own son for not identifying himself. Each of the *rhamantau* feature a scene in which the hero is obliged to do battle with his friends: in *Owein* it stems from a lordly obligation to defend the well, but in both *Geraint* and *Peredur* it occurs when the knight in question simply takes unkindly to being distracted from his thoughts. In each of these cases Cai, as Arthur's second in command and a pre-eminent heroic warrior, is the first to fight, and is inevitably defeated. Then Gwalchmai makes the attempt, and is

⁹¹⁵Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 31. 'Then the squire approached Peredur, and asked him what he was doing there and who he was. But Peredur was thinking so hard about the woman he loved best that he gave no answer. The squire attacked Peredur with a spear, but Peredur turned on him and threw him over his horse's crupper to the ground. Twenty-four knights came in succession, and he would not answer one more than another, but treated each the same – he threw each one with a single thrust over his horse's crupper to the ground. Then Cai came up to him, and spoke harshly and rudely to Peredur. And Peredur struck him with a spear under his jaw and threw him a long distance away, so that his arm and collar-bone were broken.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 80.

successful. As shown previously in the opening scenes of *Geraint*, the negotiation of identities, especially when displaced from the context of the court or the battlefield, is a fraught and important social activity. This time it is the protagonist himself who takes the place occupied by the intruder, as like Edern, he refuses to reveal his name. While Cai may indeed 'speak rudely', Peredur's behaviour is not much better. This is the action required of martial men travelling within the feminine natural space: they must be in constant competition with each other.

To break the cycle of aggression requires Gwalchmai's willing rejection of the ethos of masculine competition. This can be seen on one hand as a struggle between heroic and chivalric warrior masculinity, as is dealt with in *Geraint*; it can also be read as his temporary discarding the necessary trappings of his maleness in order to navigate a female realm. In order to avoid a fight with Peredur he employs the language of love rather than war, privileging diplomacy over martial supremacy.

Both of these aspects are supported in the text by remarks from the characters themselves. When Gwalchmai suggests that Cai's rudeness prompted Peredur's actions and offers to broker communication himself, Cai's response is telling:

'Gwalchmai,' heb ef, 'hyspys yw genhyf i y deuy ti ac ef herwyd y afwyneu. Clot bychan hagen, ac etmyc, yw itt ouot y marchawc lludedic gwedy blinhol yn ymlad. Velly, hagen, y gorfuost ar lawer onadunt wy ac hyt tra barhao genhyd ti dy tauawt a'th eireu tec, digawn vyd it o'r arueu peis o uliant teneu ymdanat. Ac ny byd reit it torri na gwayw na chledyf yr ymlad a'r marchawc a geffych yn yr answad honno.'⁹¹⁶

That Cai finds Gwalchmai's masculinity lacking is obvious. First, he diminishes the idea of a successful end result if it does not adhere to the accepted method – that there will be no honour in returning with Peredur if Gwalchmai has not first defeated him militarily, despite having achieved what he set out to do. The ends, in this case, do not necessarily justify the means, even when the means appear perfectly reasonable.

⁹¹⁶Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 32. "Gwalchmai," he said, "I am certain you will lead him back by his reins. However, little praise and honour will you get from overcoming the tired knight, exhausted from fighting. Yet that is how you have overcome many of them, and while you have your tongue and fine words, a mantle of thin, fine linen will be armour enough for you. And you will not need to break a spear or a sword fighting the knight you find in that state." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 80.

To emphasise the lack of appropriate masculine action, Cai's words make reference again to the material components of knighthood: the spear, the sword, and the armour. In particular he denies Gwalchmai armour, which encloses the knight's body so completely as to symbolically replace it – as Lurkhur observes, the chivalric male body is 'maintained whole and inviolate in armour'.⁹¹⁷ The opening scenes of *Geraint* demonstrated the feminisation of a knight without armour, and the objective of Cai's declaration that 'arueu peis o uliant teneu' ('a mantle of fine linen') will be all that is necessary is clear enough.⁹¹⁸ Masculinity requires armour; linen and delicate words are the tools of women. Fine cloth, like bare skin, signals physical weakness and effeminacy rather than martial prowess.⁹¹⁹ In practice, of course, Gwalchmai does don armour before approaching Peredur, whatever Cai says; it is amongst Arthur's instructions.

Jones and Jones, in their translation, read this passage slightly differently. Their Cai says, 'I knew Gwalchmai would not need to fight with the knight. Nor is it to be wondered at that he has won renown. He does more with his fair words than we by dint of arms.'⁹²⁰

Gowans suggests that 'instead of being alone in his point of view [Cai], on behalf of his companions, is observing [Gwalchmai]'s manners as something of a phenomenon.'⁹²¹ In this reading Cai is not necessarily disapproving, and the tension between the competing heroic and chivalric forms of masculinity is, while visible, not straightforwardly negative. Padel notes that Gwalchmai's reputation for eloquence probably pre-dates Geoffrey of Monmouth but was definitely well-established by later literature, where he is called 'tafod aur'.⁹²²

Gwalchmai's success, and indeed much of the character as portrayed in the *rhamantau*, hinges on his ability to take these insults in good humour. Rather than defending his warrior credentials he sets them temporarily aside in favour of diplomacy, positioning himself as an

⁹¹⁷Lurkhur, 'Body and identity', p. 103.

⁹¹⁸Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 32.

⁹¹⁹Burns, E. Jane, 'Refashioning courtly love: Lancelot as lady's man or ladyman?' *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie et al (Minneapolis 1997) 111-134, p. 122.

⁹²⁰Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* p. 202.

⁹²¹Gowans, Linda. *Cei and the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge 1988) p. 92.

⁹²²Padel, *AMWL*, p. 90.

effeminate supplicating party in the negotiation of Peredur's identity. According to the rules of the world through which they travel, and Peredur's own experience thus far, he is aggressive to masculine figures and agreeable to those who do not fit into the parameters of martial manhood; Gwalchmai's presentation in this situation is crucial. Indeed, his response to Cai, 'Ti a allut dywedut a uei hygarach pei as mynhut. Ac nyt attaf i y perthyn itti dial dy ulwg a'th dicofeint', shows just how unconcerned he is by Cai's accusations, as well as the strength of the homosocial bonds between men who fight together, in a way that is perfectly identifiable to modern eyes.⁹²³

It is into this homosocial circle that Gwalchmai invites Peredur. By presenting himself in armour (despite Cai's remarks) as a chivalrous warrior, but in a feminised position of non-aggression, he avoids confrontation with Peredur while still asserting his place as a worthy companion. Thus he assists Peredur in negotiating a place for himself in Arthur's circle, when hitherto he has existed only on its perimeter. Again, clothing and armour are signifiers of a change in status: 'A mynet a wnaeth Peredur a Gwalchmei hyt yn lluest Walchmei y diot eu harueu. A chymryt a wnaeth Peredur vn ryw wisc a oed y Walchmei.'⁹²⁴ Peredur temporarily abandons the trappings of his own martial self to take on the appearance, and thereby the identity, of a the chivalric knight Gwalchmai, and only then is he brought before Arthur. He has already rejected Cai's brand of blunt-instrument knighthood, despite actually having a good deal in common with him. So far, his exposure to the behaviours of Arthur's warriors has not been positive; they have been cowardly, cruel, or ineffective. Only when offered a version of manhood to emulate that can integrate aspects of heroism and chivalry does he take his place as a member of the court and return with them to Caerleon.

Here, it must also be noted, lies a significant deviation from formula. Unlike the protagonists of *Owein*, *Gereint* or continental romance, Peredur's adoption of a chivalric form of masculine

⁹²³Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 32-33. 'You could have said something more pleasant had you wished. And it is not proper for you to vent your rage and anger on me.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 80.

⁹²⁴Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 35. 'And Peredur and Gwalchmai went to Gwalchmai's pavilion to take off their armour. And Peredur put on the same kind of garment that Gwalchmai wore.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 81.

knighthood does not result in the marriage-exile-return sequence common to such tales. He does in fact leave Caerleon, but his own wanderlust appears to be as much the impetus for his adventures as his relationships. Ostensibly of course he goes in order to win the love of Angharad Llaw Eurog, but like the maiden of the fortress, his love for her proves to be short-lived, lasting only long enough to motivate him to further adventures and development of his warrior identity. Both women exist as what Gaunt refers to as agents of self-discovery for the male hero, while simultaneously causing his alienation from the masculine social sphere.⁹²⁵ In fact, despite promising to come to her aid when called, Peredur never does return to the maiden in the fortress, and he leaves Angharad nearly as soon as he has won her. Indeed, despite his immediate fixation on her, his actions in the relationship have very little to do with her at all.

Nachaf Angharat Law Eurawc yn kyfaruot ac ef.
 'Myn vyg cret, vy chwaer,' heb y Peredur, 'morwyn hygar garueid wyt. A mi allwn arnaf dy garu yn uwyhaf gwreic, pei da genhyt.
 'Miui a rodaf vyg cret,' heb hi, 'val hyn, na charaf i tidi ac na'th vynnaf yn tragywydawl.'
 'Minheu a rodaf vyg cret,' heb y Peredur, 'na dywedaf inheu eir vyth wrth Gristyaw, hyny adefych titheu arnat vyg caru yn uwyhaf gwr.'⁹²⁶

Note that unlike other tales where obstacles are created for the male lover – whether as a method of proving his devotion or of keeping him away entirely, as in *Culhwch* – Angharad does not make his lack of speech a condition of her love; she simply rejects him outright. It is Peredur who both invents and inflicts the prohibition upon himself.

McMullen observes that 'it seems noteworthy that Peredur chooses to give up speaking, rather than food, drink, sleep or a variety of other common motifs' in his efforts to win Angharad.⁹²⁷ Thus far, speech has been considered firmly in the female sphere, but in *Peredur*, the choice of whether or not to speak, of whether to adhere to the 'strong, silent type' model of masculinity, has visible and permanent repercussions on the world of the text. McMullen further argues that Peredur

⁹²⁵Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 109.

⁹²⁶Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 35-36. 'Behold, Angharad Llaw Eurog met him. "By my faith, sister," said Peredur, "you are a dear, lovely girl. And I could love you best of all women if you wished." "I give my word," she said, "I do not love you and I will never want you, ever." "And I give my word," said Peredur, "that I will never utter a word to any Christian until you confess that you love me best of men." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 82.

⁹²⁷McMullen, 'Communication of culture' p. 31.

must 'learn to construct himself as a speaking subject' without more than vague hints of assistance from his family, and here, as in his uncle's castle, the decision affects his development.⁹²⁸ So resistant is he to speaking, after the encounter in his uncle's court, that he almost seems to look for excuses to forego it, and a vow of silence in the pursuit of love lends his inability, or disinclination, to communicate a certain honourable air. The episode itself, which has no cognate in *Perceval*, functions as a slightly diminished version of his previous adventures: Peredur wanders the countryside, stays in a castle with a host who turns hostile, and becomes distracted by 'hiraeth yn ol llys Arthur a'r wreic uwyhaf a garei, a'e getymdeithon'.⁹²⁹ He once again meets Cai, who again takes issue with his refusal to offer his name. Angharad falls in love with the Mute Knight and Peredur is restored to his position; the entire episode appears to lend symmetry to the tale's structure.

Peredur has one more set of adventures before settling down with the Empress of Constantinople, an event which ends the shorter version of the tale found in Peniarth 7. This includes a battle with a monster, an encounter with a mysterious lady, and a magical healing ointment. It provides the near-final steps of his development to adulthood by integrating gendered tropes, some of which also connect it to *Owein*.

After killing the Black Oppressor, Peredur makes his way to the court of the Sons of the King of Suffering, and enters a castle where 'ny welei namyn gwaged' ('he could see only women').⁹³⁰ Like other maidens Peredur has encountered, these women live with a male household in a decidedly feminine and Otherworldly landscape, and like the other male inhabitants of that landscape, the knights here are ineffective:

...a welei varch yn dyfot, a chyfrwy arnaw a chelein yn y kyfrwy. Ac vn o'r gwaged a gyfodes y uynyd ac a gymerth y gelein o'r kyfrwy, ac a'e heneinwad y mwyn kerwyn oed is law y drws a dwfyr twym yndi, ac a dodes eli gwerthuawr arnaw. A'r gwr a gyfodes yn uyw ac a deuth yn yd oed Peredur, a'e raessawu a oruc, a bot yn llawen wrthaw.⁹³¹

928.*ibid.* p. 30

929Goetinck, *Peredur* p. 40. '...a deep longing for Arthur's court and the woman he loved best, and his companions.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 85.

930Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 46. Davies, *Mabinogion* p. 88.

931Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 46. '...he could see a horse approaching with a saddle on it, and a corpse in the saddle. One of the women got up and took the corpse from the saddle, and bathed it in a tub of warm water that was by the door, and applied precious ointment to it. The man got up, alive, and went up to Peredur, and greeted him, and made him

In this case, the men are not afraid to fight, day after day being killed by a monster and resurrected again by the ministrations of the ladies. The futility of the warrior masculine model is inescapable; the men exist purely to fight and be killed and the inevitable end is a violent death – in this case, over and over again.

The ointment itself demonstrates a level of female control over not only the landscape, but the well-being of the men. A similar scene occurs in *Owein*, but there it is the protagonist's mental, rather than physical, state which is affected. There may also be a significance to the tub of water itself, the properties of which bear a striking resemblance to the magical properties of the Cauldron of Rebirth in the Second Branch and, potentially, the cauldron Arthur retrieves from Annwn.⁹³² If the recurring motif of submersion or washing in a household vessel manages to endure through many centuries and redactions, it may be credited, at least in part, to its resemblance to the sacrament of baptism. The idea of a new life upon emerging from water was well within the medieval Christian purview.

Leaving the court, Peredur meets a beautiful woman sitting on top of a mound, who declares her love for him and gives him a gift:

A gwedy eu diflannu hyt nas gwelei, yna y kyfaruu ac ef, yn eisted ar ben cruc, y wreic teccaf o'r a welsei eiroet.
'Mi a wn dy hynt. Mynet yd wyt y ymlad a'r adanc, ac ef a'th lad, ac nyt o'e dewred namyn o ystryw.... A pheir rodut ti dy gret vyg caru yn wwyhaf gwreic, mi a rodwn it vaen val y gwelut ti efo pan elut y mwyn, ac my welei ef tydi.
'Rodaf, myn vyg cret,' heb y Peredur. 'Yr pan yth weleis gyntaf mi a'th gereis. A phy le y deisswn i tydi?'
'Pen geissych ti viui, keis parth a'r India.' Ac yna difflannwys y vorwyn ymdeith, gwedy rodi y maen yn llaw Peredur.⁹³³

There are certainly signs that this is a brush with a supernatural figure. First, the mound on which Peredur finds the maiden is traditionally the place one might expect to meet an Otherworldly figure,

welcome.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 88.

932Goetinck, *Peredur(b)*, p. 248.

933Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 47. '...he came across the fairest woman he had ever seen, sitting on a mound. "I know where you are going. You are going to fight the monster, but it will kill you. And not because it is brave but because it is clever....And if you promise to love me more than all women, I will give you a stone so that you will see the monster when you enter, but it will not see you." 'I promise, by my faith', said Peredur. 'Since I first saw you, I have loved you. And where would I search for you?' 'When you search for me, look toward India.' Then the maiden disappeared, after leaving the stone in Peredur's hand.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 89.

and is likely to indicate a supernatural role. There is some variation in the precise wording used: Sims-Williams notes the significance of '*gorsedd*' in the Four Branches, where Pwyll meets Rhiannon and where Manawydan watches Dyfed become a wasteland.⁹³⁴ The White Book version of *Peredur* has the woman sitting '*ar ben cruc*' while Peniarth 7 uses '*bryn*', but magical mounds and mountains abound in folklore and literature in both Wales and Ireland.⁹³⁵ Like Rhiannon's meeting with Pwyll, in which she claims to have been waiting for him, the maiden on the mound appears to already know Peredur and to have chosen him. He immediately appears to forget both Angharad and the maiden in the fortress, faced now with the mate the narrative has determined is suitable.

In addition to the ointment in the previous scene, another similarity to *Owein* here is the stone the maiden offers Peredur which will render him invisible to the *addanc*. Goetinck, who divides the female characters of the text into 'help' and 'hindrance', categorises the maiden and her magic stone as an Otherworldly helper figure.⁹³⁶ When she tells him to look for her 'toward India', it may function as a rationalisation of her apparent Otherworld origin and a way, as in Glewlwyd's speech to Arthur in *Culhwch*, of evoking the distant and exotic, imbuing her with an air of magnificence.⁹³⁷

While the scenes immediately following this meeting, in which Peredur overthrows another several hundred warriors, appears repetitively similar to the first section of the narrative, it contains a distinct and important difference. Previously, when Peredur defeated another wandering knight, he declared himself on Arthur's behalf and sent his vanquished foe back to Caerleon to swear allegiance to Arthur. With the arrival of Edlym Gledwyf Goch, however, Peredur begins to take on lordly roles himself. That he accepts Edlym as his follower, only to reward and release him after arranging his own marriage, marks Peredur's final step to adulthood. He gains the submission of three hundred more knights over the next three days, and instead of sending them back to Arthur,

934Sims-Williams, P. 'Some Celtic Otherworld terms', p. 64-5.

935WB: Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 47. Pen7: Vitt, A., *Peredur*, 187. Also Sims-Williams, 'Celtic Otherworld terms', p. 67

936Goetinck, *Peredur(b)*, p. 140 *et passim*.

937Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', p. 457.

claims their homage for himself.

Peredur has now been accepted into the homosocial masculine society of the warband. He has demonstrated his commitment to women and his potential as a lover. He has trained with both members of his own family and representatives of his mother's realm, and he has taken on the responsibilities of a lord of his own patrimony. It remains only for him to marry well for the construction and development of his adult social identity to be complete.

The tournament in which he meets the Empress again is a grand version of the succession-by-combat by which Owain took his kingdom. Her motivation is made explicit by the miller, who tells Peredur that 'ny myn honno namyn y gwr dewraf, canyt reit idi hi da' ('she wants only the bravest man since she has no need of wealth').⁹³⁸ It is specifically the warrior function that the lady claims to be interested in, and the martial ability to defend and successfully rule her land. Peredur, however, very nearly does not take part at all. For the second time in the story, love paralyses him, and he spends three days staring at the Empress from a distance. It is only the intervention of the miller which stirs him from his lovesick gazing and impels him to attend the tournament as a competitor.⁹³⁹

The dilemma of the Empress has attracted the attention of a number of scholars, mostly centred around her function as a figure of Sovereignty. Goetinck's work has been particularly influential in this regard, as having set out to find a Sovereignty goddess in the *rhamantau* manages to locate her very nearly everywhere. However, the Empress's character and the episode of the text containing her can be interpreted by three different lenses: that of a fairy lover, a Sovereignty goddess, or as representative of a socio-politically realistic alliance marriage. She may in fact fulfil aspects of each of these roles or indeed all, in various combinations. Once again, multiple metaphorical threads may coexist within a single narrative, and both motifs and characters can serve more than one function.

⁹³⁸Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 53. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 92.

⁹³⁹Goetinck suggests that the miller is also a rationalised divine figure, a remnant of a Beheading Game motif similar to Cu Roí or the Green Knight. See *Peredur(b)* chapter 2.

Wood, tracing the evolution of the Fairy Bride story type in Wales, explains that 'the tale is part of a widely distributed supernatural legend tradition' but also that 'the geographic milieu...indicates the close relationship between the Welsh and the Anglo-Normans, and the richness of culture which must have existed'.⁹⁴⁰ This is the same milieu from which springs *Peredur*, with its elaborate and wandering narrative through the borders of Wales. Byrne has noted, using the Breton lay *Lanval* as an example, that fairy-mistress tales can transport the hero directly into the 'adoxic' space proposed by Wade and mentioned earlier in this section.⁹⁴¹ But the otherworld brides of Wales are precisely that – fairy *brides*, not fairy mistresses, and as such still fall within the realm of human morality and, indeed, orthodoxy.

At the same time, however, the Empress's pavilion, with its rich trappings and enclosed interior space, encloses and separates her and her suitors from the rest of the landscape. Like the elaborate pavilion where Marie's Lanval meets his mistress, it acts as a surrogate fairyland, removing *Peredur* from his native landscape and depositing him in a situation entirely under the Empress's control, which functions nominally according to her rules.

However, the Empress herself remains passive, the referee of a match she is prevented from visibly influencing. When she was the maiden on the mound, she could express her own wishes, for such is the expected place for confessions of desire from a fairy lover to occur. But within the structure of the tournament, certain rules must be observed. The lady herself is a prize, an object of exchange with mediates competition between men. Chivalric culture, as Karras observes, 'was built around a myth of women's power over men through love' – erotic love was the decoration, not the objective itself.⁹⁴²

Intertwined in the kingship contest is the presence of the cups, which three challengers present to the Empress and she, in turn, gives to *Peredur*; his participation in a heavily ritualised symbolic warfare ensures his victory, and he successfully rules with the Empress in her land. Both

⁹⁴⁰Wood, Juliette. 'The fairy bride legend in Wales.' *Folklore* 103:1 (1992) 56-72, p. 56-57.

⁹⁴¹Wade, *Fairies*, p. 15.

⁹⁴²Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 25.

fairy-brides and sovereignty goddess are often associated with cups, wells, and later grails, and Bromwich suggests this, too, might indicate a fairy-mistress story attached to Peredur early on, then 'subordinated though not suppressed' in the Perceval versions.⁹⁴³

In the courtly romance version of the fairy lover trope, the focus generally remains on the human knight; he is the object of the Otherworld woman's affections but the subject of his own story.⁹⁴⁴ The sovereignty goddess figure shares a number of characteristics with the otherworld bride, but performs a different function. Rather than separating him from his social and kin groups, she defines them, setting her chosen consort above the other members of the homosocial arena but also acting as a cohesive force between them.

Bromwich has argued that the Empress appears in *Peredur* in more than one guise, and that the faraway 'Constantinople' is a rationalisation of her true identity as a queen of an Otherworld.⁹⁴⁵ Certainly the idea of humanising supernatural figures or gods into mortal monarchs is a well-attested process, and one on which the early Christian monks from Iberia to Ireland spent a good deal of energy and ink. The Germanic god Woden becomes Wayland the Smith, the Irish divinity Brigid becomes a Christian saint, and all over Europe, previously divine figures are assimilated into Christian rhetoric.

Bromwich's version of the duality discussed above includes a monstrous form rationalised into the *addanc*, while Goetinck and Lovecy concentrate more on her various human guises.⁹⁴⁶ She believes that the motifs of the chase and the hag are amongst the oldest story elements in *Peredur* and likely original, and identifies three separate accounts of the hero's fight with the monster, which certainly fits the tripartite structure favoured by Celtic storytellers. Bromwich, Goetinck and Lovecy agree that the ritual of the cup inside the Empress's pavilion serves a similar function to the water in the Irish kingship rituals and the stories of Niall and Lugaid Láigde, and the tournament itself as a

943Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 458.

944Byrne, Aisling. 'Fairy lovers: sexuality, order and narrative in medieval romance', *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse, and Cory James Rushton, eds. (Woodbridge: 2014) 99-110, pp. 99, 102.

945Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', p. 457.

946Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', pp. 457-8.

rationalised version of the succession-by-combat paralleled in *Owein*.⁹⁴⁷

The third possible interpretation is less fantastical. There has been relatively little discussion about the Empress as a mundane, mortal figure rather than an Otherworld being or a sovereignty figure, despite an ongoing discussion of the limits of the sovereignty motif in other instances. Natalia Petrovskaia, proposing 'an *antithesis* to Goetinck's *thesis*'⁹⁴⁸ suggests that the *amherodres* may actually refer to Matilda, a suitably independent and exotic female ruler who also insisted on retaining her title as Holy Roman Empress throughout her life.⁹⁴⁹ This would strengthen the political engagement of the text which Aronstein and others already suppose, as well as providing a reason the apparent but unspecified end of Peredur's fourteen-year reign.⁹⁵⁰ While not necessarily placing the text in the immediate context of the Anarchy, Petrovskaia also notes that 'in the late-thirteenth century...the introduction of a fictional imperial host with Plantagenet associations into the Wales of an Arthurian narrative may have been a very powerful intentional political statement'.⁹⁵¹

Like the *iarlles* of *Owein* and the myriad other damsels in distress assisted by Peredur during the course of the narrative, it is possible to read the Empress simultaneously as a symbolic Otherworldly figure and one inspired by, if not a direct reflection of, realistic circumstances. This is key to understanding the complexity of *Peredur*, which continually operates on multiple levels.

The final adventure

The story which unfolds after Peredur's fourteen-year reign with his Empress is more sequel than ending, though it likely owes much to those continuations of *Perceval* by those other than Chrétien himself. This section includes the arrival of the 'morwyn bengrych du', a digression which follows Gwalchmai's adventures in the Fortress of Wonders, and Peredur's eventual reunion with the

947Lovecy, 'Celtic sovereignty theme', p. 142.

948Petrovskaia, Natalia I. 'Dating Peredur: new light on old problems', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 29 (2009): 223-243, p. 225.

949*ibid.* p. 238.

950Petrovskaia's thesis is interesting and merits discussion, whether or not it will prove convincing. Also worth noting is that the period of time between Matilda's invasion in 1139 and the end of the civil war in 1154, marked by Stephen's death and the crowning of Henry II, is fourteen years.

951Petrovskaia, *op. cit.* p. 242.

empress. As discussed previously in this chapter, scholars have debated its place in the text, beginning with Mary Williams in 1909. Lloyd-Morgan rightly insists we should view both versions as complete, and Roberts suggests that perhaps the 'last redactor of the long version has attempted to help the reader by providing a concluding sequence of adventures, partly based on...a genuine "Story of the Castle of Wonders" but also utilising *Perceval*.'⁹⁵² Some details are inconsistent with the earlier sections of the story, especially within the list of the Curly-haired Maiden's accusations, and a collection of confusing encounters lead to an unsatisfying conclusion. The gendered themes repeat themselves from earlier encounters, but there are some few things worth exploring in greater detail. These are the description and significance of the Black (or Curly-haired) Maiden, the social rules governing Gwalchmai's adventure, and the final episode with the maiden, the stag, and the *gwyddbwyll* board.

The maiden who arrives at the court is presented in a clear and energetic parody of traditional female beauty: her teeth, rather than her hair, are 'melynach no blodeu y banadyl' ('yellower than the flowers of the broom'), the description used for Olwen's golden hair in *Culhwch* and alluded to in the Fourth Branch in the creation of Blodeuwedd. Her skin is 'duach...no'r hayarn duhaf a darffei a bygu' ('blacker than the blackest iron daubed with pitch') and her body is misshapen in all the wrong ways.⁹⁵³ This clear treatment of the Loathly Lady motif – well-attested both in *Perceval* and Irish and English texts as well – does go some way toward bringing the text back in line with the sovereignty themes that Goetinck and others have discussed.

The maiden's intrusion also parallels *Owein*, where a messenger from his deserted wife appears in Arthur's court and pronounces his exile. Goetinck suggests that 'the bulk of the Black Maiden's message before it was influenced by the French romances' would also have centred on his abandonment of his marital and lordly responsibilities.⁹⁵⁴ Whether or not this is the case, or to what degree *Peredur* and its various versions influenced each other, the rest of the narrative plays out in

⁹⁵²Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 194, Roberts, 'Text in transition', p. 71.

⁹⁵³Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 36-37. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 94.

⁹⁵⁴Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study* p. 149.

such a way that it does appear to be part of a reconciliation such as appears in the other *rhamantau*. The land of Peredur's uncle, the maiden claims, is now steeped in conflict: 'A bellach brwydreu ac ymladeu, a cholli marchogyon, ac adaw gwraged yn wedw a rianed yn diossymdeith.'⁹⁵⁵ This she blames on Peredur's failure to ask questions about the bleeding spear in his uncle's court. However, there are discrepancies within the story she tells and the one we have just read. Lovecy points out that the maiden 'places the incident in the court of the wrong uncle, halves the number of youths carrying the spear, and reduces by two the drops of blood on it. Each of these discrepancies tallies with the story as it appears in Chrétien's poem.'⁹⁵⁶ More important however may be McMullen's observations on the importance placed on speech throughout the text, and that by following his uncle's instructions and not ask fatal questions, Peredur has been 'unable to engage in the speech acts that have begun to demarcate his developing identity and instead [has] become a passive observer of everyday linguistic functions.'⁹⁵⁷ When Peredur was a child, he asked questions of everyone; when he was told to stop he did, and now he is being held responsible for a failure to transcend his uncle's advice – or, perhaps, a failure to have learned the importance of context, over the course of his growth; not to resist questions entirely, but to learn to understand when they are appropriate.

The effects of Peredur's abandonment on the landscape, however, do not come as a surprise. Throughout his journey he has been the only defender of its inhabitants, and the only member of his maternal kin group capable of negotiating and crossing the boundaries between Arthur's world and his mother's, of acting as a masculine warrior figure in a land populated by the young, the feeble, the old. In Peredur the wild external and internal courtly spheres converge. Like Owain's failure to continue to protect the magical spring, Peredur's return to Arthur's court has put the otherworld land in danger; unlike Owain, his desertion has actually provoked, not only threatened, decay. However,

955Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 57. 'But now there is conflict and combat, knights lost and wives left widowed and young girls unprovided for....' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 94.

956Lovecy, Ian. 'Historia Peredur ab Efrawg', *AOW* 171-182, p. 178.

957McMullen, 'Communication of culture', p. 31.

the land and courts of Peredur's maternal uncles has little or nothing to do with that of his exotic and distant wife, at least not explicitly or so far. (That connection will come only at the end of the tale.)

The Black Maiden also functions as a challenger, an intruder into the court – a figure which occurs in both Celtic and continental texts as a disruptive force which challenges the cohesion of the collective, homosocial warrior unit.⁹⁵⁸ Such characters – the aggressive knight earlier in the *Peredur* text, the Green Knight of *Gawain*, or the challenger of *Fled Bricrend* – serve not only to impel the plot on its intended course and the sedentary knights onto other adventures, but to 'testify to the realm of the marvellous' and remind the court of the existence of an untamed, unconquered magical land where glory and great deeds await.⁹⁵⁹ For even while chastising Peredur for his failures she brings a challenge and the promise of glory and adventure to the other knights. At her distant home, she explains,

[pwy] bynhac a vynho ennill clot o arueu ac o ymwan ac o ymlad, ef a'e keiff yno os dirper. A vynnei, hagen, arbenhicrwyd clot ac etmyc, gwn y lle y kaffei. Kastell yssyd ar uynydd amlwc, ac yn hwnnw y mae morwyn, ac yn y gyfeistydaw yd yttys, a phwy bynhac a allei y rhydhau, pen clot y byt a gaffei.⁹⁶⁰

The purpose of her arrival in the hall is twofold: to force Peredur's return to the land that needs him, and to prompt another knight to leave the court for further adventures. In case the second purpose is not clear enough – and to lend the episode the symmetry the entire text demands – a second intruder appears, this time of a martial mien and with a direct challenge to Gwalchmai.

A meint milwr a'e angerd yndaw, yn gyweir o varch ac arueu....Ac ar yscwyd y marchawd yd oed taryan eurgwrwydyr a thrawst o lassar glas yndi, ac vn lliw a hynny yd oed y arueu oll. Ac ef a dywawt wrth Walchmei, 'Ti a ledeist vy arglwyd o'th twyll a'th vrat, a hynny mi a'e profaf arnat.'⁹⁶¹

This coincides with the point in *Perceval* where focus shifts from the title character to Gawain and

958Byrne, Aisling. 'The Intruder at the feast: Negotiating boundaries in medieval insular romance'. *Arthurian Literature* XVII (2010) 33-58, pp. 35-37.

959*ibid.* p. 40.

960Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 57-8. 'And whoever wants to gain fame in arms and combat and conflict will do so there if he deserves it. But whoever wants the ultimate fame and admiration I know where he can get that. There is a castle on a prominent mountain, and in it there's a maiden, and the castle is under siege. Whoever could set her free would receive the highest praise in the world.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 95.

961Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 58. '...of the size and strength of a warrior, and equipped with horse and armour....On the knights' shoulder there was a gold-chased shield with a cross-piece of blue azure, and all his armour was the same colour as that. He said to Gwalchmai, "You killed my lord through your deceit and treachery, and I will prove it to you.'" Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 95.

his adventures – although Chrétien does return to Perceval, that part of the tale is less complete than in *Peredur*, and ends with his joining a religious hermit in an ascetic lifestyle rather than with a marital reconciliation. The Welsh redactor of *Peredur*, by contrast, appears determined to end the story only after tying up all loose ends in some fashion.

Gwalchmai's adventure, here dealt with in far fewer lines than in Chrétien's version, is concerned with themes of hospitality, obligation and revenge, and through these can be seen to relate to the end of *Peredur*'s tale as well. Although the two men set out together, 'o achaws eu ketymdeithas a meint yd ymgerynt' ('because of their friendship and the extent of their love for each other') they part ways before reaching their respective destinations.⁹⁶² Gwalchmai, intent on proving his innocence in the accusation levelled at him by the gold-armoured knight, is welcomed into a castle by an earl and his sister, and offered hospitality. It happens, of course, that this earl is the son of the man Gwalchmai is accused of killing, and one of the inhabitants of the fortress lays a trap for him. When Gwalchmai traps the 'gwr gwynllwyf' in a tower with the help of the earl's sister, it results in a stalemate to be mediated only after the earl returns from hunting. Even then, the matter is not resolved. The earl tells Gwalchmai, 'kam oed it dyfot y an llys, o gwypud lad an tat ohonot. Kyny allom ni a dial, Duw a'e dial arnat' ('it was wrong of you to come to our court, if you knew you had killed our father. Since we cannot avenge that, may God avenge it').⁹⁶³

The earl and his sister, of course, have every right to be angry with Gwalchmai for what they might reasonably see as exploiting their hospitality. They exist within a social context that prohibits violence against guests, and their own position now requires them to act in his defence. Had the earl known Gwalchmai's identity before inviting him in, he could have refused to host him – Gerald of Wales reports being refused entrance by William FitzAlan, who 'feared he would not be able to protect Gerald from...plunder and molesting'.⁹⁶⁴ In *Perceval*, the vavassor who is the earl's

⁹⁶²Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 59. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 95.

⁹⁶³Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 60-1. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 96.

⁹⁶⁴Kerr, Julie. The Open door: Hospitality and honour in twelfth/early thirteenth-century England.' *History* 87 (2002) 322-35, p. 332. See Brewer et al, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, iii. 227-8.

corresponding figure in the French text finds himself facing the possibility of choosing between loyalty to his lord and to his obligations as a host. Julie Kerr observes that this obligation stems from the understanding that 'the stranger who dismounted, disarmed and entered another's house thereby placed himself in a vulnerable and risky position' and therefore necessitated that a stranger feel certain of his host's willingness, but also ability, to protect him.⁹⁶⁵ The host, however, was also dependent on the honourable intentions of the guests. For a twelfth-century example, in 1141, Ranulf of Chester and William of Roumare captured Lincoln Castle by pretending to send their wives in as visitors. When they arrived later, apparently unarmed, to escort the ladies home, Orderic Vitalis reports that they grabbed makeshift weapons and took the castle.⁹⁶⁶ A version of the story of Nest in *Brut y Tywysogion* reports that Owain visited her 'as his kinswoman' before abducting her in the night.⁹⁶⁷ It is for this – the potential for betrayal on either side – that the earl criticises Gwalchmai; if the knight arrived and took shelter knowing they would have to protect him against their own better interests, it is certainly unworthy behaviour. It also ties into Map's contention that Welsh hosts refrained from questioning their guests for three days, and Jones's suggestion that this is precisely the sort of situation such a convention was meant to avoid.⁹⁶⁸ It is Gwalchmai's honourable nature which salvages the situation, as he agrees to depart and return after a set span of time, at which point he will no longer be a guest under their roof and can address the accusation. Whether or not he actually did kill their father is left unclear in the text, though with the vast number of unidentified knights in the *rhamantau*, it is certainly possible.

The encounter establishes that the characters have left the boundaries of the previous landscape. This fortress is occupied by virile masculine warrior figures who are capable of being effective on their own behalf, who are not waiting around for a new arrival to solve their problems. It also establishes Gwalchmai, who has so far been a role model but kept confined within Arthur's

⁹⁶⁵*ibid.* p. 331.

⁹⁶⁶Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. M. Chibnall (6 vols, Oxford 1969-1980), iii. p. 20.

⁹⁶⁷Williams ab Ithel, John. *Brut y Tywysogion* (London 1860) pp. 82-83.

⁹⁶⁸Map, Water. *De Nugis Curialium: Courtier's Trifles*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooks and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1983) p. 182. Jones, 'Heads or grails', p. 28-9.

court and its environs, as a fit companion for Peredur, who travels with him now as an equal.

Finally, it addresses themes of vengeance and honour which will again be important at the end of the text, and to some extent parallels Peredur's adventure.⁹⁶⁹

If there is indeed a latent sovereignty motif in *Peredur*, it is at its strongest in the penultimate episode of the text, in which the hero's reconciliation with the empress is facilitated by a loathly lady, a white stag hunt, and a threefold combat with a mysterious and magical foe. After a stay at the home – or rather, in the prison – of another foreign noble, which Peredur frees from a siege and wins the love of a king's daughter, he reaches the Fortress of Wonders.⁹⁷⁰ That he has stepped into a magical location is evident by the living *gwyddbwyll* game he sees upon entering.⁹⁷¹ This is similar to the episode at the end of *Gereint*, in which the protagonist must challenge a clearly magical creature within her own space. While *Perceval* requires the hero to play against one side's pieces in order to gain entry, Peredur's ability to move between magical and mundane worlds continues to serve him, and he does not need to fight or win his way through. His days of simply gazing at wonders are behind him, however, and when the side he decides to support loses, he disrupts the entire scenario by throwing the board into the lake.⁹⁷² This impulsive act, which Peredur immediately regrets and must remedy, can be seen as a metaphorical re-enactment of the rejection which saw him leave the Empress and return to Caerleon in the first place, and if he is to have her back, he must repair the symbolic rift by successfully completing a number of magical and martial challenges.

It is, of course, not nearly so simple as the Black Maiden originally suggests to him, for even after Peredur fights the appointed enemy neither the board nor his lady are actually returned to him. Also interestingly, when Peredur fights the black-haired man at the Fortress of Ysbidinongyl, he does not kill him, but negotiates instead for the return of the board in exchange for the enemy's life.

969Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 201.

970At Caerleon, the Black Maiden referred to her home as 'Kastell Syberw', the Castle of Pride, and says it is home to sixty-six knights. This suggests it is not the same place as 'y Gaer yr Enryfedodeu' which Peredur seeks.

971This may be a reference to the *Gwyddbwyll* board of Gwenddolau ap Ceidio, one of the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain, which 'if the pieces were set...would play by themselves.' Bromwich, *TYP3*, p. 260.

972Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 66. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 100.

Throughout the text, Peredur defeats a good many knights and oppressors but actually kills only a few of them, choosing instead to accept their surrender and homage, either on his own behalf or someone else's. This is not unusual in the context of a realistic reading in which knighthood is an expensive endeavour and defeated foes are worth more alive than dead. However, the Black Maiden is not satisfied with the results of this encounter, and sends him off again to prove himself by actually killing something. Bromwich and Goetinck both associate several connected aspects with the sovereignty figure: the Black Maiden herself, who doubles as the darker side of the Empress and sets before Peredur the tasks he must complete to be accepted by her; the white stag which resembles the golden fawn of the Irish Lugaid legend; the lake that the lady is found near and the combat with an obviously unearthly foe.⁹⁷³ The stag itself is described as having 'vn corn yssyd nny tal, kyhyt a phaladyr gwayw' – a description which immediately calls to mind a unicorn.⁹⁷⁴ That animal's association with the purity and virginity of women appears quite early, at least from Isidore of Seville.⁹⁷⁵ The death of such a creature by the hero could be seen as a pseudo-sexual reclamation of the lady's body, especially as she holds its severed head in her lap; certainly Bromwich suggests the creature and the lady are symbolically one and the same.⁹⁷⁶ Goetinck, however, argues that the one-horned stag is representative of the animal version of the Balor figure, 'those Otherworld creatures with only one eye, or one leg', such Ysbaddaden or even Peredur's lame uncle.⁹⁷⁷

Whatever the case, the death of the stag certainly causes the lady herself to appear. While not explicitly stated, it seems likely she is the same 'amherodres' as he ruled with, and she sets before Peredur the final obstacle to their reconciliation: a fight with a man beneath a slab.⁹⁷⁸ The

973Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', p. 449. Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study*, p. 131, 150.

974Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 68. '...one horn in the centre of his forehead, as long as a spear-shaft, and as sharp as the sharpest thing.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 101.

975Hispalensis, Isidorus, Etymologies X11, 2:12-13, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Barney, Stephen A., Jennifer A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, eds. (Cambridge 2002) p. 252. Maidens in unicorn hunts appear in manuscript illustrations in abundance from the thirteenth century. See especially British Library, Royal MS 12 F. xiii, f. 10v, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 132, Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 1511 and British Library, Harley MS 3244.

976Bromwich, 'Celtic dynastic themes', p. 449.

977Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study*, p. 151.

978Lovecy argues that 'according to this narrative, Peredur does not leave the Empress. In one sentence he is ruling with her; the next he is at Arthur's court.' 'Celtic sovereignty theme', p. 143. However, one does not appear at one place from another without leaving the first, and the suggestion is in keeping with the 'gain-loss-reconciliation' structure of romance and the episodes which follow.

initial parallel with the guardian of the well in *Owein* is clear enough, but unlike that black knight, this defender is not part of a living realm. It is impossible not to associate the *llech* at the base of a bush with a grave, and his equipment shows signs of age and wear: 'march yscyrnic y danaw, ac arueu rytlyt mawr ymdanaw ac ymdan y varch'.⁹⁷⁹ If Peredur's journeys indicate a conflict between a heroic milieu and a courtly one, the adoption and adaptation of certain aspects of an increasingly chivalric warrior model while negotiating colonial concerns, then here is the physical representation of that conflict. The hero – a young knight in his prime who has visibly and tangibly accepted the trappings of a courtly model, even while maintaining the ability to move through a variety of landscapes – comes sword-to-sword with a tired, ageing figure struggling to defend the sovereignty of his native land. When the *gwr du* sinks below the ground at last, he takes Peredur's horse with him, denying him part of his native warrior identity and necessitating he go on foot to look for it.

Despite having complete the tasks, Peredur does not find his lady again, so it may be that his failure to complete any of the tasks to satisfaction means he has failed, and the reconciliation will not take place. By a mythological reading, this would mean that sovereignty is not restored to him, and he fails in his ultimate objective to become a lord in his own right. Instead of the Empress, he is reunited with Gwalchmai, a 'gwr llwyd cloff' ('lame grey-haired man') who may be his uncle, and a 'gwas melyn' ('yellow-haired lad') who claims to be not only his cousin, but to have arranged and enacted everything else which led to this point:

...mi a deuthum yn rith y vorwyn du y lys Arthur, a phan vyryeist y clawr, a phan ledeist y gwr du o Yspidinongyl, a phan ledeist y karw, a phan uuost yn ymlad a'r gwr du o'r llech. A mi a deuthum a'r pen yn wadlyt ar y dyscyl, ac a'r gwayw a oed y ffrwt waet o'r pen hyt y dwrn ar hyt y gwayw. A'th gefynderw biowed y pen a gwidonot Kaer Loyw a'e lladassei, ac wynt a gloffassant dy ewythur. A'th gefynderw wyf inheu, a darogan yw itti dial hynny.⁹⁸⁰

This is not an entirely satisfactory resolution, relying on an uncomfortable amount of *deus ex*

979Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 69. '...on a scraggy horse, and big, rusty armour on him and his horse.' Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 101.

980Goetinck, *Peredur*, p 69-70. "I came in the guise of the black-haired maiden to Arthur's court, and when you threw away the *gwyddbwyll*, and when you killed the black-haired man from Ysbidinongyl, and when you killed the stag, and when you fought against the black-haired man from the slab. And I brought the head on the salver, all covered in blood, and the spear with the blood streaming along it from its tip to its hilt. And the head was your cousin's, and it was the witches of Caerloyw who killed him, and they made your uncle lame. And I am your cousin, too, and it is foretold that you will avenge that." Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 102.

machina that, as do so many features of medieval Welsh prose, likely worked better in oral recitation than on parchment. Lloyd-Morgan observes that while it appears a 'crude device...by this stage the abruptness can be accepted as a typical feature of the narrative style'.⁹⁸¹ It certainly challenges the idea that Peredur's sovereignty is the ultimate objective of the text, at least in the longer version, as it ends rather with his return to Arthur's court to ask for help defeating the witches. (The shorter version in Peniarth 7, which ends with Peredur's reign with the empress, of course may have its own objectives.) Rather, the theme of vengeance which has, as Lloyd-Morgan has noted, run through the entirety of the text, is brought back to the forefront in time for a climax which has been the subject of foreshadowing throughout the tale.⁹⁸² When Peredur first met the witches, one told him, 'Tyghetuen a gweledigaeth yw im godef gouut y genhyt' ('it was fated and foretold that I should suffer grief at your hands').⁹⁸³ This suggests – whether or not an original version of the tale included Peredur's vengeance against the witches for his family's fate – a certainty and lack of agency on the part of the characters themselves. Ito finds their dual nature as teacher and object of vengeance an 'ironical twist...nobody but they can teach Peredur how to kill his supernatural opponents, including themselves'.⁹⁸⁴ This section is, in fact, what she labels the *Tynged*, the final culmination of the many disparate threads that make up the narrative. Lloyd-Morgan categorises it as the 'main vengeance quest and conclusion', linking it back to the first vengeance themes, involving dwarves and wronged women, earlier in the text, but also finds that 'the force of destiny' impels the adventures of the minor characters as well as Peredur himself.⁹⁸⁵

Throughout the text we have seen Peredur navigating the conflicting boundaries between his mother's vaguely-Otherworldly realm and the *llys* of Arthur and his men, and it is tempting to view his final act – mustering Arthur's *teulu* to inflict revenge upon the witches – as a way of setting the matter for good. Like the death of Ysbaddaden in *Culhwch*, this final victory, especially when

981 Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 219.

982 Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', 198-99.

983 Goetinck, *Peredur*, p. 30. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 79.

984 Ito, p. 198.

985 Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 198, 226.

combined with Peredur's return to the fold, appears to bring a wild and magical landscape under Arthur's jurisdiction. The witches are a disruptive and *native* force, and Peredur has accepted the chivalric model of masculinity represented by Gwalchmai and which Aronstein and Over see in this Arthur's court; the act of killing those who helped him reach his full potential could be seen as the triumph of a courtly model influenced by the proximity to Anglo-Norman culture over traditional Welsh custom.

The witches may be connected to those Cai is credited with killing in *Pa gur*; although the poem states that he went to 'Ystavingon' to do the deed.⁹⁸⁶ This, combined with the fight against the Black Witch in *Culhwch*, would suggest that witches were enemies of Arthur from a much earlier date, rather than kindly teachers betrayed by an ungrateful student. Furthermore, the revenge motif itself contradicts the idea that Peredur is choosing the *llys* over the connection to his family, for all the wrongs he is avenging here were wreaked upon his maternal relatives. Lloyd-Morgan observes that Peredur is generally lost without the guidance of his family, all of whom appear to know more about him than he does himself, and have to explain things to him repeatedly.⁹⁸⁷ Indeed, it could perhaps be better viewed as the impetus for the successful merging of both aspects of Peredur and his world: with his own dual nature finally secure, he is also able to impel Arthur and the other knights out of Caerleon and into a real battle.

Their ultimate victory is not even a case of male superiority, for the witches occupy an ambiguously gendered area in which female bodies take on masculine attributes of warfare. Rather, like the thematic overlay of *Culhwch*, this is a victory of the collective warrior masculinity of the *teulu* over everything, and everyone, else.

Peredur gives us a long, involved and complex view of the process of a young knight's coming-of-age, richer in detail than either of the other *rhamantau* or *Culhwch*, and thus is a fitting *denouement* on which to end. It shows how female characters are crucial in the shaping of a

986Jarman, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, p. 68 'Yguarthaw ystawingun / Kei a guant nav guiton'.

987Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative structure', p. 228.

warrior's identity – not only lovers and potential lovers, but the hero's mother and all his maternal kin. His mother, his uncles and the witches who represent the maternal landscape all do far more toward building Peredur than his father's legacy of tournaments and courtly life, and this in itself directly conflicts with a French version which suggests the hero disavow his mother's advice as soon as possible.

It attributes a vague Otherworldliness to female characters by virtue of their place in the landscape, even when the troubles and situations they face are perfectly mundane. And finally, it shows how conflicts between courtly and heroic models of masculinity and genre play through the text, and although courtly models win out on an individual level, the collective masculinity of martial brotherhood retains a significance in the Welsh text that its continental counterparts actively resist. Indeed, it challenges the idea of any particular ideology reigning supreme, but in the figure of Peredur and his ultimate victory – whether in the shorter version or the longer – shows that success in one world depends on the ability to navigate not only its boundaries, but the customs of its neighbours.

Conclusion

As we have seen, gender and genre are inextricably linked in medieval literature. The mediation of the male protagonist's identity by the interplay of his relationships with either women or other men is a crucial factor in the categorisation of texts, and indicative of the ethical systems on which they are founded. In heroic texts, the hero rises and falls in the company of men, propagating an idealised view of warrior brotherhood in which women are largely excluded from the value system. While mothers retain influence over the fates of their sons, this power can be assumed instead by men, either through a symbolic second birthing process, through the dismantling of her prohibitions, or simply by greater force of arms.

In courtly tales, meanwhile, the hero's masculine identity is shaped and guided by feminine forces in the form of mothers, lovers, and the myriad damsels, distressed countesses, and woeful brides that populate the landscape. Homosocial masculine relationships in these tales are more likely to be confrontational or competitive than those found in heroic texts, and while the war-band remains an important institution, its functions are more limited as the hero's individual journey and successes are foregrounded. Women in the romances are included in the value system in an ideological sense if not always a practical one; while they may help or hinder the hero on his journey they are seldom likely to effect significant change.

Models of masculinity are grounded in overcoming challenges – leaving the father's table, taking up one or more adult roles: husband, lord, valued member of a *teulu* – in short, masculine identity is based on what a man actually *does*. Within a warrior model, two primary variations can be found which correspond to the generic distinctions of the texts: the collective and hypermasculine 'heroic' model and the romantic 'courtly' one. Meanwhile clergy and poets, as keepers of traditional and esoteric knowledge, engage in their own masculine rivalry. Religious men also often define themselves in martial terms, but represent their battles as taking place on a

spiritual, rather than physical, plane. Finally the poets are a curious and hybrid model of gender, primarily masculine but with the ability, and even the expectation, to accommodate feminine characteristics.

Feminine historical models are constrained by biological factors in a way masculine ones are not, and governed primarily by life cycle stages and the capacity for reproduction. Literature does not strictly adhere to these historical models, though it does make use of them. Female characters are found as maidens even after marriage, as mothers who claim the power to shape their children's lives for better or worse, and populate a wild feminine landscape with challenges for the hero to overcome. Old women, no longer possessing the capacity for childbirth, result in anxiety for a masculine society and are subject to suspicion as witches and hags. Finally the sovereignty goddess, a figure to whom both antiquarian scholars and twentieth-century feminist theorists were devoted, may appear as a lingering remnant of an ultimately mythological textual substratum – however, the evidence is thin and the texts themselves do not require such a reading.

We have seen how, while male characters are able to directly enact their desires, female ones are more likely to engage in speech acts to manipulate the world around them. This can take the form of magical pronouncements such as *tynghedau* or prophecies, but is just as likely to be persuasive in nature, reminding the men around them of their social obligations and provoking them to actions. Few female characters in these texts act so directly as men, and those who do are, like the Witches of Gloucester, not entirely feminine themselves.

In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the collective martial action of Arthur's war-band triumphs over everyone and everything else, while *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn* hint at a darker, grimmer aftermath of their masculine exploits. In none of these texts do women's words result in significant change to the world around them, even when they try to exercise what agency they have. In *Owein*, Luned mimics energetic masculine movement to arrange affairs to her liking, but it is her words which elicit more tangible effects, while *Gereint* uses both speech and silence to shape its

protagonists' identities. Finally, *Peredur* shows how men, too, must understand the value of speech, and how failure to integrate this otherwise feminine attribute into their own identities can have dramatic negative results.

The poems, *Pa gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn*, introduce the idea of the masculine mortal hero and female Otherworld, a theme which carries on in some form throughout the *rhamantau* as well. Here it is characterised by the cauldron and the nine maidens, a theme which evolves over time to include saints' holy wells and even the Grail legend. Masculine companionship is privileged above other concerns, with the male hero clearly forming the norm and ideal by which all are measured. Meanwhile, female power is presented as dangerous uncivilised wasteland or – ambivalently and sometimes simultaneously – symbolic of home and hearth.

In the *rhamantau* the inherent difficulty in reconciling the ideals of the native 'heroic' tradition and the continental 'chivalric' one, very much in fashion in the high middle ages, becomes most apparent. As Kirstie Chandler notes, 'as Wales absorbed an ever increasing array of social and cultural influences and adapted its native social and cultural ideals, concepts of masculinity changed dramatically.'⁹⁸⁸ Portrayals of women also shifted, attributing to them more agency and influence, a development likely coterminous with the revisions of parts of the Welsh legal codes. *Owein* and *Gereint*, despite not being placed together in the manuscripts, engage in a lively intertextual dialogue as they struggle with the conflicting loyalties and obligations of men as husbands, lords, and loyal members of a *teulu*.

Some texts have, of necessity, been left out of this project that would undoubtedly prove valuable in a more expanded study. I have been able to make only the smallest mention of the Arthur who appears in the saints' *vitae* – the single exception deals with the kidnapping of Gwenwhyfar in the *Life of St Gildas* – or in the Taliesin poems other than *Preiddeu Annwn*; the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* are referred to throughout but never as a single body of work. Neither have I been able to devote time at present to the Welsh Tristan story, which revisits some of the familiar

⁹⁸⁸Chandler, *Masculinity in Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 5

Celtic themes and deals with the consequences of adultery. In *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, the old-style heroism and the reverence in which the contemporary poets hold it become the object of satire, and the text reflects some fascinating contemporary criticism on the construction and illusion of knighthood and masculinity. These are all promising avenues of potential later research, which will no doubt add to and possibly correct this original foundation.

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